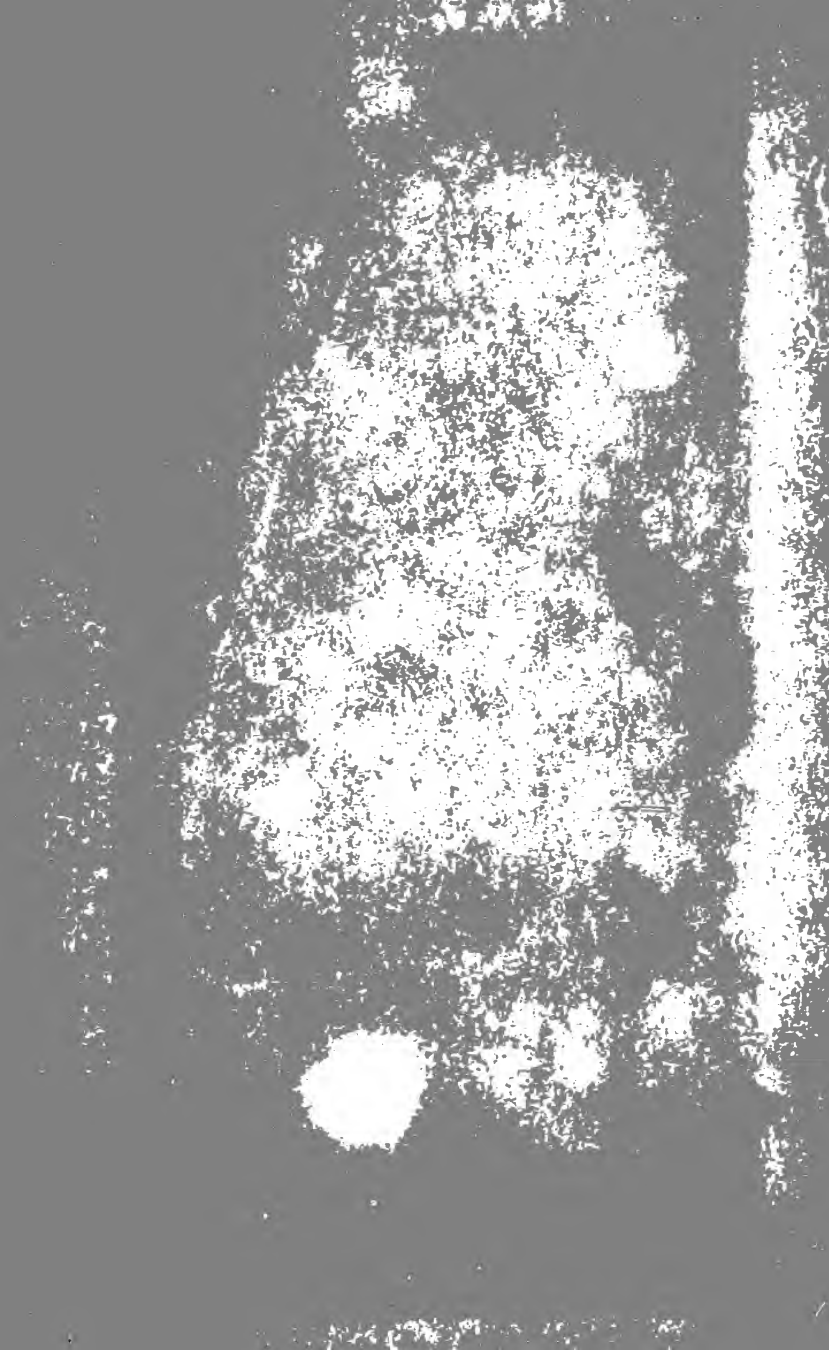
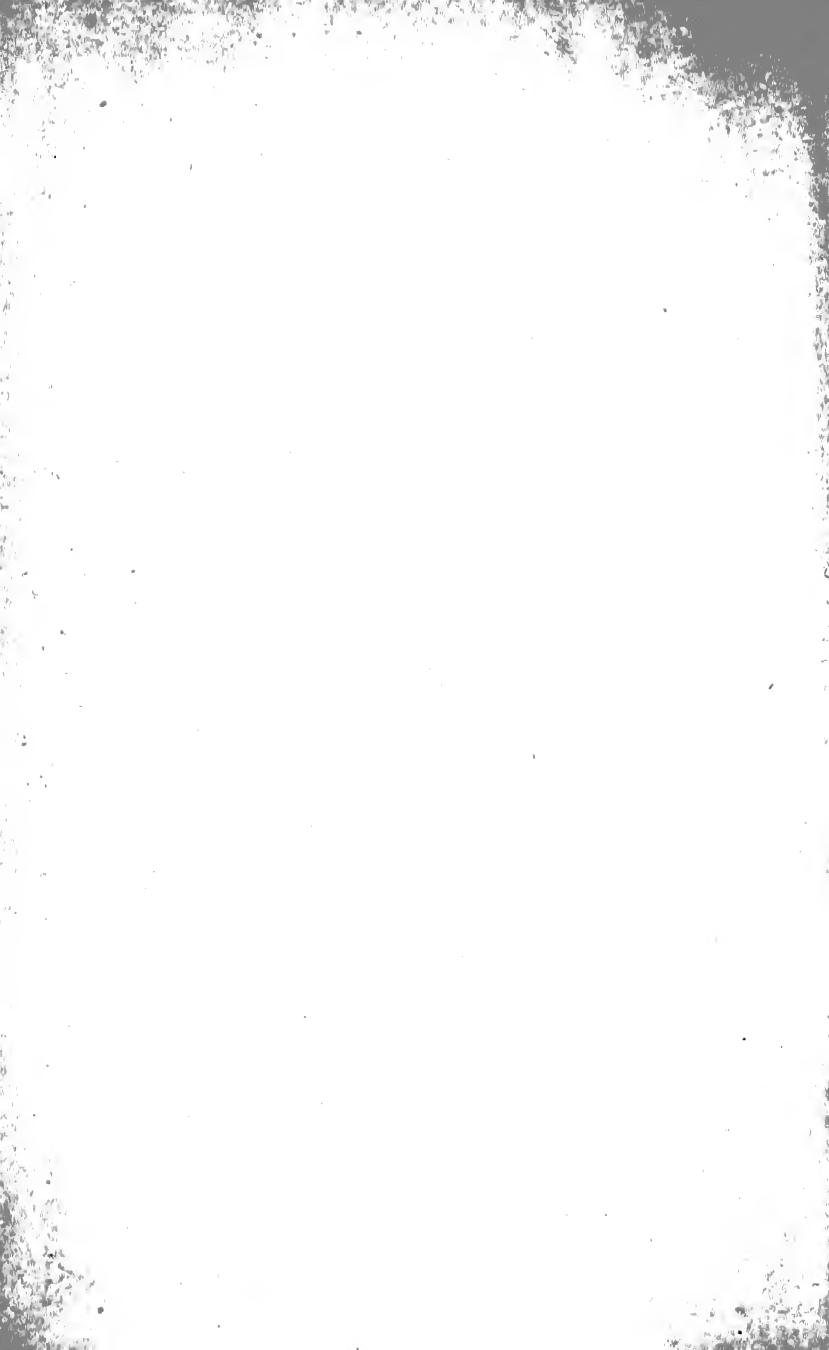


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THE
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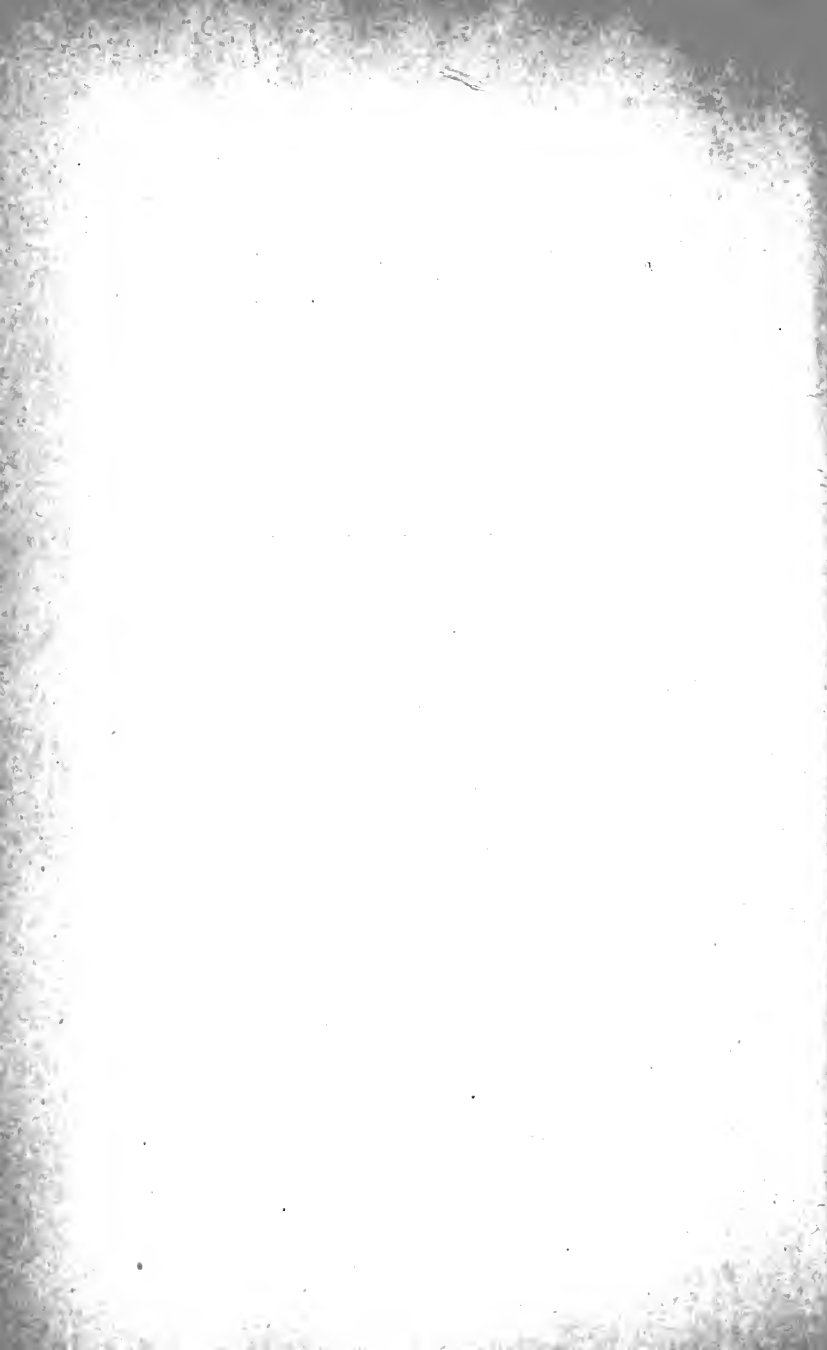
BY
JAMES PAYN
AUTHOR OF 'BY PROXY' ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. II.

LONDON
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1886

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CONTENTS

OF

THE SECOND VOLUME.



CHAPTER	PAGE
XVIII. THE HOROSCOPE	1
XIX. AN EDITOR	16
XX. GOOD NEWS	34
XXI. AN UNWELCOME VISITOR	50
XXII. ON THE PIER	63
XXIII. THE CONFEDERATES	83
XXIV. TITANIA	102
XXV. SENT FOR	116
XXVI. OUTSIDE THE WINDOW	130
XXVII. A TURN OF THE TIDE	149
XXVIII. CONGRATULATIONS	175
XXIX. A NEW DEPARTURE	192
XXX. IN THE MARYLEBONE ROAD	209
XXXI. A VISITOR	227
XXXII. IN HAREWOOD SQUARE	246
XXXIII. EDITOR AND CONTRIBUTOR	264

THE
HEIR OF THE AGES.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE HOROSCOPE.

WHATEVER shadow might be hanging over the little household at the Look-out, in the way of pecuniary embarrassment, it did not obtrude itself upon any one's notice. The burden of that secret had been so long borne by the widow herself that it had ceased, except occasionally, to oppress her; she gathered her roses, such as they were, while she might, and, thankful to see her son so cheered by the presence of his cousin and her friend, and them so well pleased with his companionship, she took her share of the

general contentment, and shut her eyes to the future. Blessed indeed is the constitution that permits its possessor so to do. To bear the ills of life with resignation and philosophy is doubtless good ; but to be able to ignore their approach, although we have full knowledge of it, until they are actually at our door is a more enviable gift. It is not too much to say that one-half of the misery of human life consists in apprehension, of which at least one-fifth turns out to be groundless. Curiously enough, though Mrs. Meyrick herself trembled, as we have said, only occasionally at the menaces of Fate, and never shuddered and shrank from them as some would have done, Roger Leyden never forgot the evil days that were coming with such certainty, if not upon Matthew, at all events on his mother. It might have been—nay, it would have been—worse for her to have seen him harassed by penury, to feel that his poor maimed life lacked its comforts ; but, though she had so far ventured to keep him in happy ignorance of their position, what an outlook,

reflected the kind old archæologist, had the poor widow even as it was! The best that could happen was that her boy should die while the money lasted—*i.e.* at an early date ; and then, bereft of the only being to whom she clung, there would remain for her an indefinite number of years to be passed in loneliness and penury.

Such considerations, I have noticed, so long as they affect others at least, are wont to influence persons of well-regulated and orthodox minds but little ; they not only bear the misfortunes of their friends with resignation meet and meek, but accept them with such humility and acquiescence in the ways of Providence as make themselves appear even more earnest and well-principled than they were to start with. These harsh notes, in short, just as the exception proves the rule, seem to their attuned and well-regulated ears to give assurance of the universal harmony.

But in some minds, not so happily constituted, the miseries, present or to come, of

their fellow-creatures, and especially if they are dear to them, have a disquieting effect. They are not only moved—considering what (present company excepted) we all deserve—to undue consideration for the victim, but are led into impious doubt as to whether things in general happen in the world exactly as they should do, and with relation to desert. Whenever Roger Leyden thought of Mrs. Meyrick and her future—and he very often thought about it—his mind was apt to take this dangerous and deplorable direction.

On the next day but one after his introduction to the governess he spoke to her on the subject with great frankness and vehemence, and, it must be confessed, not without finding some response. From a person literally so well schooled as Miss Dart, one might have expected a reproof of such sentiments, if not a logical discourse, with arguments properly suited to the occasion; but, on the whole, she sympathised with him; and so curiously is human nature constituted that agreement of this kind will sometimes consolidate

a friendship in a marvellously brief space of time, which many years of acquaintanceship, with the genteelst opportunities of cultivating it, will fail to establish. The proof of this in the present case was that Roger Leyden invited Miss Dart to inspect his private residence. Every Englishman's house is said to be his castle, but Mr. Leyden's house was not only a real castle, but was environed by all the difficulties of approach, and more, which the law feigns to provide. No one ever entered it without the owner's leave, and very few obtained that permission. He made an exception in favour of such persons as were attracted to the little town by its historic and archæological interest, but of ordinary visitors he saw nothing. There was, indeed, little accommodation for such folk, and nothing to show them. The place was scrupulously clean, which, in the case of an antiquary's residence, was unusual ; but it was ill provided even with the most ordinary furniture. The few rooms it contained were low and dark ; the windows were small, and placed at

such a distance from the rooms (on account of the immense thickness of the walls) that to look through them was like looking through a telescope. The staircases, which were both of stone, were spiral, and led, the one to an open watch-tower, on which there was scarcely room for two people to stand; the other to Mr. Leyden's bed-chamber, where there was just room for him to lie at length with ten feet of stone all round him. In the centre of the Castle, which was half in ruins, was a sunk courtyard, full of spring flowers, which the sun scarcely ever reached, except at midday. In the summer, indeed, it was a blaze of colour, the warmth and brightness of which contrasted strangely with the rusty bars and paneless windows of the rooms on the same level, which had once been the Castle dungeons. If Roger Leyden had a weakness, he used to say (as though astrology and archæology were to be counted as strong points) it was for flowers that flourished in such old-world and gloomy places, where they seemed to shine like good deeds in a naughty world.

The chief apartment of the Castle was the central room, an octagon with a stone roof; and here, on an oak table, were spread various 'finds,' in the shape of ancient relics, which Roger had picked up in the neighbourhood. Each was carefully numbered, and bore a neat inscription setting forth the date and place of its discovery. The sacredness of this apartment (the only stone octagon in the county) and its contents had, in the eyes of their proprietor, no parallel in profane history; and woe to the visitor who fingered brass or bone in an irreverent spirit! Nay, woe even to the less sacrilegious who allowed his attention to be distracted from the records of the historic past while its owner was dilating on them! In such cases, the lecture would suddenly change its form and become a philippic.

The only person who was exempted from these severities was Mrs. Meyrick. On that good lady, clothed in the mail of good-natured indifference, the whole armoury of the past, from flint knives downwards, was

powerless to make the least impression ; and Roger had long given her up as incorrigible and contumacious, but without that desire to hand her over to the secular arm, to be burnt alive, which most fanatics feel under such circumstances : he only pitied her from the bottom of his kindly heart.

On the present occasion she had accompanied Miss Dart to the Castle from motives of propriety (Mary Melburn remaining at home to keep Matthew company), but had left her in charge of her host at the entrance of 'the museum,' as she persisted, to his horror, in calling it.

'I only worry Roger, my dear, with my ignorance about all these wonderful things,' she whispered. 'It's no use his explaining them to me, for what goes in at one ear goes out at the other ; and I shall leave you to have your mind improved for a few minutes while I have a chat with old Rachel about her cream cheeses.'

Old Rachel was Mr. Leyden's sole domestic, and possessed the secret of making

the delicacies in question to perfection ; she had revealed it in confidence to many of her friends and neighbours, but, it was supposed, with some reservation, since in their hands the article never attained the same fulness of success as in her own. The matter, however, was so diplomatically managed that she still continued to maintain both her popularity and her reputation.

Mr. Roger Leyden's lecture was by no means so formidable an affair as his audience of one had been led to expect ; it was sententious rather than diffusive, and mildly explanatory instead of being dogmatic, and, what was still more unexpected, his manner gave her the impression of his being pre-occupied with something else. Had a spectator been present, it is even probable that he would have pronounced the disciple to have been more interested in the matter on hand than the demonstrator himself. Miss Dart, who had never before seen a torque for example, was eloquent in her praise of the chaste and simple ornament. Her enthusiasm

seemed to please him, but without arousing a kindred flame.

‘You understand what is worthy of admiration,’ he said, ‘and express your appreciation becomingly. Most young ladies who see these things are seized with a desire to try them on. I feel about that something of what Walter Scott felt when the town councillor (or somebody) would have placed the old crown of Scotland on the head of a lady visitor. The attraction of this armlet in my eyes is that the last arm it rested on was probably that of some Saxon or even ancient Briton.’

‘It is curious,’ observed Miss Dart, ‘that at this very day it is the custom, I hear, among the golden youth of London to wear torques, only they call them bangles.’

‘Vanity has as rank a growth in the light soil as in the clay,’ observed Mr. Leyden. ‘Virgil tells us that the Trojans wore these ornaments when they colonised Italy; they were common, too, among the Persians and the Gauls.’

‘Moreover,’ observed Miss Dart, ‘a great portrait painter has left it on record that he found his sitters of the male sex at least as solicitous to be represented favourably as the ladies.’

‘No doubt, no doubt,’ returned the antiquary. ‘Still, it is not every man who wishes to have his portrait taken, which can hardly be said of women. The torque, after all, was an exceptional distinction, whereas there is hardly a grave of any Roman lady without its speculum and tweezers.’

‘No Roman remains, I suppose, have been found on Battle Hill?’ observed Miss Dart, who, piqued, she knew not why, by her companion’s reticence, was desirous to hear him discourse upon his favourite topic.

‘Nothing has been found save these few coins of Egbert.’

‘And do you suppose that they form a portion of some greater and undiscovered treasure?’

‘Certainly not,’ he answered confidently; ‘they were dropped there by accident, just

as you might lose a sixpence stooping in a strawberry bed.'

'There were no gold coins in Egbert's reign, I believe?'

'No; there was nothing made of gold but a few ornaments, and the crosses and vessels of the Church.'

He was regarding her with great attention, yet with a far-away look, like one who has his mind fixed both on the present and the future. 'Surely now,' she thought to herself, 'he is about to tell me of the treasure.' It was not that the subject had much attraction for her, save in connection with the man himself, who had awakened in her as great an interest in his way as Matthew Meyrick had in his. She felt as a painter feels who happens upon some rare and striking model, that he was no ordinary study in human nature.

'Miss Dart,' he said, with gravity, 'I think myself fortunate in having this opportunity of saying a few words to you in private; like Pilate's wife, I have had

a dream about you which troubles me much.'

'A dream?—and about me?' she answered, smiling. 'If a dream, as I have read, is the consequence of having had its subject in our waking thoughts, I ought to feel complimented.'

He waved his hand as though to dismiss such trivialities as compliments from the matter under discussion.

'I have thought of you much ever since I saw you first,' he went on; 'but that has naught to do with what I speak of. Elizabeth Dart, I have cast your horoscope, and the lord of the ascendant at your nativity I find to be the sun. That, to begin with, is a great matter, for against such fortunate persons the malefic influence of the stars avails but little.'

'The stars in their courses hitherto, Mr. Leyden, have, nevertheless, fought against me and mine,' she answered, quietly. She did not want to argue with him, but there was something in her nature which forbade her to humour even an innocent superstition ;

moreover, though her disposition was cheerful, she lived in no fool's paradise. Her thoughts had wandered to a certain lonely lodging, where sat, after a life of honest toil, a gentle woman, troubled by rheumatism, waiting for an old age of poverty and pain.

'I know it, I know it,' he answered, confidently; 'but it will not always be so. In this dream of mine I tell you I beheld the sun environed by the twelve signs, save Pisces, which was defective.'

'Fish is a luxury, which accounts for it,' thought Miss Dart.

'Only the sun—now mark this—was nine times bigger than the true sun, which denotes a corresponding increase in your estate.'

'That will give me a capital of 90*l*.,' observed Miss Dart, smiling, 'for I have just got 10*l*. which I can call my own.'

'Peace, peace!' he answered, reprovingly, and in solemn tones. 'I tell you it is appointed that you will be immensely rich. Wealth will be no curse to you as it is to the majority of its possessors, for you will

make good use of it ; you will remember the widow and the orphan. . . . My dear Mrs. Meyrick,' he broke off as that lady entered the room, 'Miss Dart began to think you would never come ; she is sick and tired of my antiquarian lore, and longs to be at home with Matthew and Mary.'

It was clear to Miss Dart that she had offended her singular host, and yet the apology she would have offered was difficult to make.

It would have been impossible for her to express belief in horoscopes or the auguries of dreams ; moreover, it was plain from the old man's words that he wished no reference to be made in the presence of a third person to the subject of their conversation. 'I am very sorry to have shown myself such a sceptic, Mr. Leyden,' she murmured, as they shook hands.

'No matter, I am used to being discredited,' was his quiet rejoinder.

CHAPTER XIX.

AN EDITOR.

EVERYBODY, not in the first flight of fashion and ignorance, must remember the sensation caused by the first appearance of the 'Millennium Review'—nay, even fashionable people deigned to notice the existence of that phenomenon, when, after rising like a rocket through the literary empyrean to an unparalleled altitude, it remained there emitting showers of wit and fancy. It was published, of course, (to supply an obvious void in literature) ; the wonder was that it found one and succeeded in filling it. Some one said that it was suggested by the well-known lament of the divine who enlarged the sphere of ecclesiastical harmonies, that 'the devil should have all the best tunes.' At all events, its declared object

was to enlist under the banner of Orthodoxy certain talents, such as wit and humour, which had hitherto been retained by the other side. Only, from the nature of things, it was necessary that the Orthodox should be exceeding broad. From the High and Dry, therefore, this publication could look but for little sympathy, and still less from the Evangelical party. But between high-water mark and low-water mark opinions are plentiful as sand and various as shells, and it was to this section of the reading public that the 'Millennium' appealed. The editor of this new venture, one Felix Argand, was a man of character. His opinions within certain not very clearly defined limits were audacious, and he had the courage of his opinions. Contrary to the advice of his friends, he had invested all the money he had in the world in this literary speculation. In vain had they judiciously pointed out that the brain-worker and the wire-puller were *dramatis personæ* which should never be undertaken by the same individual ; since, if once the grit of worry gets into the delicate wheels of intellect,

there ensues disaster. Argand answered, 'I know it, but I must be entirely untrammelled in this affair, or I shall sink like a stone.'

They watched his proceedings with a smile of compassion, and—it seemed, with that 'Millennium' round his neck, like a miracle—they beheld him float. Success assured, at all events for the present, he became the prey of quite another set of advisers. For himself they cared nothing, but they were earnestly desirous to make use of his enterprise for the advocacy of their theories. 'In some respects the principles of the "Millennium" were so admirable,' they said; 'what a pity it is you suffer it to fall short of perfection.' The High Church party entreated him to become "a bulwark." A great and venerable authority offered to contribute an article upon the 'Translations of Bishops.'

'Dear and reverend sir,' he replied, 'you mistake the nature of the question that the public is putting to itself. It is not whether there shall be any more Translations, but any more Originals.'

The venerated (and titled) head of the Evangelical party besought him in moving terms to remember that philanthropic endeavour without dogmatic faith was only one of the million roads to the everlasting bonfire.

‘My lord,’ he replied, ‘I admire your philanthropic exertions beyond everything ; but it seems to me that you have made a religion for yourself out of the worst parts of Theology.’

Felix Argand was one of the gentlest-natured men that ever took pen in hand ; but he resented dictation, and had a habit of expressing himself epigrammatically. His personal appearance was striking : tall and thin, with flowing hair and eloquent brown eyes, he had the appearance of a religious enthusiast ; but though ingenuous and frank to a fault, and cordial (where he liked people) in a remarkable degree, he was well acquainted with human nature ; not easily deceived, and never deceived twice by the same arts ; with a tongue smooth and gentle, but sharp on

occasion like a razor, he held his own against all comers. Though his aim was nothing less than the regeneration of society, he entertained no false hopes of its accomplishment. To leave the world better than he found it was his highest expectation. His heart was tender towards all who were worthy of compassion; but cold as steel towards the base. The coquetting of the humanitarians with the cruel aroused his bitterest contempt; and servility and sycophancy his keenest ridicule. With Whig or Tory he had no sympathy; the utter independence of party politics exhibited by the 'Millennium' was one of its specialties; and, though a spiritual tone pervaded it, it was wholly unsectarian.

Though Felix Argand had taken the highest honours at Oxford, he had derived no material advantage from them, since his peculiar principles had forbidden him to accept the terms on which alone a Fellowship could, at that time, be obtained. His reputation, however, had preceded him to town, where

by that circle which still concerns itself with University matters, while it does its work in the larger literary world, he was warmly welcomed. With such exceptional advantages, his talents soon obtained recognition, if within a somewhat limited sphere ; and his pen gained him an income which, supplemented by some small private means of his own, was amply sufficient for his needs. This source of support, however, in a short time became precarious—not from any falling off in the value of his contributions, but from the views expressed in them. Editors complained that he was angular—a fatal bar to eminence in journalism ; and the application of the smoothing-iron was borne with impatience. His mind, though not, perhaps, very logical, was essentially original. Some said he was not ‘quiet in harness’ ; but others went further, and averred that he was not adapted either for riding or driving, but, like the wild horse of the Ukraines, fit only to rove at will, or at best, to take part in those Roman races which are run without saddle or

bridle, with the spur of his own imagination pricking his sides.

Of course, he was pronounced unpractical ; and, indeed, he was so in the sense that he could find no groove to fit him ; but, with less reason, it was deplored that he was utterly ignorant of the world. Felix Argand, indeed, concerned himself not so much with the doings of the world as with its thinking ; but the latter he made his particular study, and became surprisingly familiar with it. He possessed an unusual share of human sympathy, and a manner that invited confidence. With the opinions of philosophers and sages mankind is well acquainted, for they can be read in books ; but with the views of our own friends and neighbours, regarding matters that are out of the sphere of their everyday existence, we rarely think it worth our while to inquire. Teachers and preachers imagine that in providing them with doctrine they have inspired conviction and supplied them with faith. Felix Argand had the intelligence to perceive that this was not the

case. He learnt that among a large minority of ordinary thinkers the great principles of Belief survive in the ashes of Dogma ; the ' Millennium ' was addressed to readers as far removed from Orthodoxy as from Agnosticism, and found its public. The success accomplished was great and immediate ; but its peculiarity lay in its personal character. The originator of this enterprise, who had been hitherto only a moderately well-known figure in London life, became a personage and a power. He was still young, which increased the marvel ; and even younger in heart than in years. He sympathised with the youthful doubter, with the budding poet, with the thinker who had just burst the shell ; he read every contribution, or some part of it, with his own eye ; it is not surprising, therefore, that as his good-nature got to be understood his correspondence became considerable ; and yet it was said that he never left a letter unanswered.

Of course, he was immensely laughed at. Editors of a more practical kind did not

hesitate to aver that he had a bee in his bonnet, though they acknowledged that it was a working bee. Such unparalleled amenity could only be explained by a hankering after popularity, and what made his conduct still more reprehensible was that he gained his end. Such dereliction from professional practice it was, however, a comfort to think must bring its own punishment. Like the lady who betrayed the city and was smothered with bracelets, he must presently be consumed by the gratitude of his correspondents, and it did in fact consume some hours daily of his precious time.

Of Felix Argand, even Elizabeth Dart, in the land of the Philistines, had dimly heard ; but only once had she held in her hand a copy of the ' Millennium ' ; it was not a sort of periodical to be found in a lady's school, or lying on the drawing-room table of a house like Burrow Hall ; and it cost five shillings. This was in her case a prohibitive price. Still, she had seen it, had turned over the leaves of an old number exposed on a book-stall, and

wished that she had a shilling to spare with which to purchase it. But the Court of Chancery within her, in the shape of Conscience, had sternly decided that the 'Millennium' was not a necessary, but a luxury. She understood the nature of the publication in a vague and imperfect way, much as she had learnt that of its editor, and she entertained a sincere admiration for them both.

Once or twice, indeed, of late years, when stirred by a certain yearning which has been hinted at, she had taken her courage in both hands and sat down to address this unknown friend to whose attention the love of literature was said to be a password, but the letter had never been sent. The very fact that his door was so frequently on its hinge to all applicants had deterred her. It was not vanity and egotism after all which, under pretence of modesty, impelled her to join the throng. But now, when the matter was no longer a personal one, and this friendly hand might be of some service to another, she had no such scruple in entreating its guidance. She resolved to

apply to Felix Argand on behalf of Matthew Meyrick.

Her pen, though as well practised in private as a two-year-old racer, was not so fast; it could hardly be called that of a ready writer; though far from fastidious, she was never content with a good word when a better seemed wanting; and she shrank, above all things, from inflicting her tediousness upon any correspondent. In this case it was essential to be brief, and yet there was so much to say. As to her own judgment of Matthew's talent, she put it aside as though it were worthless; she inclosed two of his poems, the one he had given her, and 'The Children' (of which she obtained a copy from Mary without, however, revealing the use to which she intended to put it), and let them speak for themselves. But she described in a few touching lines the circumstances of the poet, his youth, his poverty, his incurable disease, and the happiness which encouragement from the hand to which she was appealing would confer upon him; above

all things, she pleaded for the truth: if he thought there was a real promise in the young man's productions, she entreated him to say so. There were no compliments (though she might conscientiously have used compliments) save that implied in her confidence of getting a reply. Being, for a woman, exceptionally reasonable, she did not expect an answer for some days. She received one, however, at the end of forty-eight hours, in a hand perfectly legible, but which gave the impression of its having run away with the writer.

‘ Dear Madam,’ it ran—

‘ The specimens you have sent me of your young friend's muse are full of promise, and even give some performance. I return the MSS. by another post, lest the sight of them, as implying rejection, should unnecessarily disappoint you. The fact is, though there is no bar to the admission of verse into its columns, the “ Millennium ” has as yet printed none, and “ The Children ” is hardly of sufficient merit to lead the van. On the other

hand, I thought so highly both of it and its companion-poem that I offered them to my friend the editor of the "Parthenon," and he has accepted both. One, "On an Old Harpsichord," will appear in the next number of his magazine, and here it is in type. I know from experience that there is nothing like seeing himself in print for encouraging a young author, and I hope this will have the happy effect on your protégé which you seem to expect. On the other hand, I need scarcely tell you that his hopes must not be raised too high. His circumstances and opportunities, we must remember, though disadvantageous enough from a practical point of view, have in reality been propitious to the development of this particular talent of verse-making. His music is but the echo of the strains of others, and this present poem would never have been written had not Locker sung before him. Nevertheless, whosoever fails to recognise its merits is incapable of judging such matters. You must allow me to add that whatever sympathy I feel for this young man is far

exceeded by the interest which has been excited in me by the letter of his introducer. I say nothing of the tenderness and good feeling which prompted it—for editors, you know, have nothing to do with sentiment. I am referring solely to the perfection of its composition, which does you, madam, something beyond credit.

‘The modest silence you maintain upon your own affairs makes it somewhat difficult for me to address you upon the subject, but I wish to say that if you have yourself any desire to join the army of Captain Pen, the “Millennium” would be willing at least to favourably consider the application of such a recruit. At all events, I forward the six last numbers of the review for your guidance in such a case.

‘I am, madam, yours sincerely,
‘FELIX ARGAND.’

As Elizabeth Dart read this letter, her limbs trembled, her face grew pale, and her whole being experienced a shock of delight.

It was as if a door had suddenly opened to her into a heaven of which she had often dreamt, but which she had had no expectation of entering. It seemed to her that this man had read her very soul. The next moment she blushed with shame at her own involuntary but unaccustomed egotism. What ought to have given her most pleasure was surely not the encouragement addressed to herself, but to Matthew. What delight—nay, what benefit—would such gracious praise afford him! How enchanted would he be to see his verses in the ‘Parthenon,’ where only poems of exceptional merit were, she knew, admitted! How kind it was of Mr. Argand to have caused a proof to be struck for him! How much better the little poem read in print than it had done in manuscript!

ON AN OLD HARPSICORD.

Its varnish cracked, its paintings scarred,
Its dainty gilding sadly marred,
And turned to dingy umber,
It stands forlorn, a waif or stray
Of glories long since passed away—
An ancient piece of lumber.

What more ? And yet how rich it is,
This harpsichord in memories
And quaint associations,
Recalling that far time, when still
High birth and title had their will,
And kings were more than nations.

When gallants wore the true grand air—
And wigs by half a morning's care
Made wondrous smooth and sheeny—
And, while the perfumed pinch they took,
Lisp'd languid rhapsodies on Gluck
Or may be on Piccini.

I touch the keys—the startled chord
Can scarce a weak response afford,
That wakes a low vibration
Among the slackened palsied strings :
A feeble spell, and yet it brings
A magic transformation.

An antique aspect veils the place—
A weird, oppressive, ghostly grace
That almost makes one tremble ;
A mystic light pervades the air,
Faint footfalls gather on the stair,
The belles and beaux assemble.

The belles and beaux ? Alas, the ghosts,
Thin shadows of once reigning toasts,
And heroes of the duel.
They smile, they chatter, they parade,
They rustle in superb brocade,
They shine with many a jewel.

They flirt their fans with pretty airs,
They tap their precious *tabatières*,
They smooth their ruffles grandly ;
While here and there an exquisite
Lets fall his studied stroke of wit,
And waits for plaudits blandly.

The harpsichord is quavering soon
A minuet's slow triplet tune :
A courtly powdered couple,
All formal graces, bend and slide,
With curtsies marvellously wide,
And bows politely supple.

The tune is changed : with graceful ease
Fair spirit fingers sweep the keys,
A spirit voice is trilling ;
The passionate 'Che faro ?' strain
Comes like a half-heard cry of pain
From some far distance thrilling.

The lights go out ; the voices die ;
Among the strings strange tremors fly,
That slowly sink to slumber :
The harpsichord remains alone,
A monument of glories done—
An ancient piece of lumber.

It was an echo, no doubt ; but it was also full of echoes of that picturesque past which it was intended to portray. And then the writer was but a boy. For the moment she pictured to herself the intense pleasure she would have in showing him his first-born in

its robe of print ; but only for a moment. There was one who would have a still greater pleasure in so doing, and to her she would delegate that grateful task : Mary Melburn should be the messenger of this good tidings.

CHAPTER XX.

GOOD NEWS.

THE connection between our physical and spiritual natures is not yet understood, or tonics would not so often be prescribed for the dispirited. A piece of good news is often more beneficial to the invalid than all the steel and iron in the chemist's shop. If this truth were accepted, it is possible that cheerfulness and kindness would more commonly enter into the treatment of those volunteer physicians of the human race who, to judge by their teaching, know no other specific for our woes than the patience to bear them ; if it were not, indeed, more easy to preach philosophy than to offer comfort, and especially so infinitely cheaper, it would be surprising that so obvious a remedy should be neglected. Could Felix Argand have been aware of the pleasure his

letter and its contents diffused at the Look-out, he would have thought it worth his while—for to see others happy was a great enjoyment to him—to have journeyed thither to witness it. It pervaded the whole atmosphere of life there like a perfume.

First, as we have seen, it transported Elizabeth Dart to the seventh heaven, realising—or bringing within measurable distance of realisation—what had hitherto been but a dream, making the merely possible probable, and giving wings to hope. Very exaggerated sentiments, it may be thought, to arise in any woman from so slight a cause. Yet to some natures the opportunity of telling their thoughts to the world is at least as attractive as that of shutting themselves out from it in monasteries and nunneries is to others. The impulse is an exceptional one in both cases—much more so in the former than in the latter—but when it exists it is very powerful. Sooner or later the swollen tarn will find, of course, a way for itself; but in its mountain home, afar from stream and river, it lies

ignorant of this law of its being, and welcomes the first outlet with exuberant joy. At the same time, nothing could be more foreign to the character of Elizabeth Dart than that desire of rushing into print which, so far from being an exceptional impulse, is nowadays the most common form of vanity. That enterprise, undertaken commonly with so light a heart, and solely or chiefly with the idea of personal gratification, was invested in her eyes with a certain solemnity and a sense of responsibility at which, perhaps, Mr. Felix Argand himself would have smiled. She felt none of that eagerness for immediate action which seizes upon most aspirants for literary fame under similar circumstances. She was well content to wait as before ; but not, as before, without reason for the hope—nay, the faith—that was within her. She was like one who, having once become assured of her lover's affection, is in no hurry for its fruition, but is satisfied with 'a long engagement.' It behoved her now to consider whether the thoughts that had so often blossomed in her mind, and some

of which she had, with more or less of adequacy, set down on paper, would bear transplanting and the open air. Upon the whole, her happiness, though great, was very sober and subdued.

The reception of her good news by Mary—to whom, however, she had only shown so much of Mr. Argand's letter as referred to Matthew—was of a very different character.

‘How very, very, very good of you it was, dear Lizzie!’ she cried, with sparkling eyes, ‘and how like you, to have thought of writing to Mr. What’s-his-name about dear Mat! And how delighted he will be! How I should like to see his face when he first sees his beautiful poem in print!’

‘You will certainly have that gratification, since it is you who shall show it to him.’

‘Oh, Lizzie, that would not be fair!’ she murmured hesitatingly; ‘it is you who have done it all. I am much too stupid to have thought of such a thing, and much too frightened of editors to have dared to do it, even if I had thought of it. I wish I was clever

and courageous like you. I wish—oh, how I wish—it was I who had done this for Matthew!’

The tears came into Mary’s eyes as she uttered this aspiration.

‘Lizzie,’ she added, gravely, ‘you are much more worthy of him than I am.’

The governess laughed aloud, and executed an elaborate curtsy.

‘I am well aware, my dear,’ she said, ‘that you have paid me the highest compliment that is in your power to bestow ; do not, however, work yourself into a state of jealousy, for which, I do assure you, there is no ground. What, I suppose, we both desire is to give your cousin as much pleasure from this occurrence as possible ; and as it is quite clear that good news from your lips would be much better news to him than from mine, from yours it must come.’

Then the two girls made a confidante of Mrs. Meyrick. She was not a lady much given to literature ; but next to David—who possessed, however, an unfair advantage in

being inspired—she had always believed in Matthew as the greatest poet that ever lived. When she saw his verses in print, she was quite sure of this. Under these circumstances, it was creditable that she did not ascribe his success entirely to his own merits.

‘You are a dear girl, Miss Dart,’ she said, embracing her; ‘most people who had screwed their courage up to make such an application to a stranger would have done so on their own account, and not for a poor crippled boy.’

‘I never thought of that,’ said Mary, penitently.

‘But I had no poem to send,’ observed Miss Dart, smiling.

‘You might have written one, if you had thought of it,’ asserted Mrs. Meyrick, confidently, as though a poem was a postscript.

It was amazing how small a circumstance had made these three women happy, and also made one of them so dear to the others.

Presently, Mary tripped into the Pavilion, where Matthew, as usual, when it was not

‘the children’s morning,’ was polishing up a poem.

‘I am coming to interrupt you,’ was her audacious observation.

He put his pen aside with a pleasant smile, and answered, gallantly, ‘I wish life were made up of such interruptions.’

‘I dare say you do. But I have brought you a present.’

‘A present?’

‘Yes; you must guess what it is. What is it you would like best in all the world?’

He gazed at her bright face and sparkling eyes with wonder.

‘That is a very large order,’ he answered, playfully. ‘I am not sure that just now I have it in stock.’

‘Think, think,’ she went on, with eager excitement; ‘what is it that is most often in your mind? What is the dream of your life, which you, nevertheless, have been convinced would never be accomplished?’

He shook his head, but not like one who gives up a riddle; there was a piteous yearn-

ing in his face which told what he would like best only too well, since it was plain that he would never get it. Mary was sobered in a moment.

‘Why, Matthew, how dense you are!’ she exclaimed, in a changed voice. ‘Is it not fame that you are always thinking about?—and here it is, or at least the beginning of it,’ and she held out the printed poem. The colour rushed to the young author’s cheeks.

‘What is this? How comes this about?’

‘Through dear Lizzie Dart. You gave her the MS., you know, and she sent it to some friend in London, who has put it into the “Parthenon;” is it not kind of her?’

‘It is more than kind; but she told me that she had no literary friends.’

‘True, I am doing her less than justice. It was to a stranger, a Mr. Argand, that she wrote, pointing out how beautiful your poems were, only that you were too modest to think them worth printing; in which you see she was quite right. She will tell you all about it presently, only she thought it would give you

greater pleasure because I am your cousin, and—and—so on, to hear the first news from me.'

'In which, again, as you say, she was quite right,' said Matthew, earnestly.

'And don't they look nice in print, Mat ; and are you not pleased ?' inquired Mary, hurriedly.

'Yes, yes ; I should be ungrateful indeed,' he murmured ; then added, inconsequently, 'we cannot expect to get everything we want in this world.'

'Not at first, of course not ; but, as Lizzie says, now that you have once got your foot in, it will be your own fault if you do not keep the door open ; and the "Parthenon" is such a high-class paper.'

From the bottom of her heart did Mary wish that her good news had been intrusted to a more discreet messenger than herself. If it had been Lizzie, or indeed anybody else, Matthew would have thought only of the verses ; but those unfortunate words she had used, 'What would you like best in all the

world ?' had drawn his mind away to another subject, which, though well understood by both, it had been tacitly agreed between them should never be alluded to. She would always love him with a love far beyond that of a sister ; but brother and sister they needs must be. How deplorable it was that he should thus permit himself to repine at the inevitable ! It was surely much harder for her, since in all probability she would outlive him : and now to bewail his loss, to ignore the relations that existed between them—how cruel as well as foolish it was in him ! But no ; his lot, after all, was harder than hers, and her heart smote her for the unuttered reproach. As he turned slowly on his crutch to the window, and looked out in silence on the grey and gloomy sea, it was an immense relief to her that when he spoke again it was upon the matter in hand.

' I have heard something of this Mr. Argand,' he said ; ' he is said to take an exceptional interest in young writers.'

' But only, I suppose, when he sees there

is something in them. I don't see why you should depreciate yourself in that way.'

'I am not, for a wonder, thinking of myself just now at all, Mary. I am thinking of Mr. Argand and Miss Dart. Here are two people who have gone out of their way—Miss Dart a great deal out of her way, for it must have cost her much to address him, a total stranger—to do another a great kindness, and here am I, a selfish cripple, doing nothing for others, and always bemoaning myself.'

'Mat, be silent,' interrupted the girl, vehemently. 'I will not listen to you. You shall not say such things.'

'Nevertheless, they are true, my dear. Perhaps, if through this opportunity I should get something to do, matters may mend with me in this respect. In that case, it will be hard to overrate the benefit it will confer upon me.'

The reflection was wise, but unwholesome, because unnatural. Such self-consciousness in one so young could hardly have arisen in a healthy mind. 'And I tell you what, dear,'

he continued, gravely, 'there is some one here who has found this out. Some one who is vastly superior to me, though I have been used to think so highly of my own talents.'

'That is ridiculous; mere mock modesty, Mat,' put in Mary, confidently. 'Mr. Leyden is very clever in his way, but his wits are not within miles of yours.'

'I am not by any means sure of that; but I am not thinking of Roger, I am speaking of Miss Dart. I believe she knows me, Mary, as thoroughly as you do; and even better in some ways. Under pretence of hearing other people's ideas, she suggests them, and reads their characters like a book. Now, if Mr. Argand could get *her* to write for him, it is my conviction he would draw a prize.'

'That's just what your mother says,' replied Mary, laughing; 'and I am sure Lizzie is very talented, and all that, but she is very weak in some things in which, as I am sure, no really very clever woman could be.'

'In what things?'

‘Well, I am not quite at liberty to say; but mamma, who has sharp eyes for such matters, you know, is quite of my opinion. In particular, I think you are wrong about Miss Dart being a judge of character.’

‘Indeed,’ said Matthew, thoughtfully. ‘Now that surprises me very much. I mean your mother’s having expressed such an opinion of Miss Dart.’

‘You think she is wrong,’ said Mary, smiling.

‘I am sure she is wrong.’

‘Well, time will show. If it shows you are right, so much the better. We shall not grudge you your superior wisdom. Good Heavens! there is Jefferson.’

In truth, at that moment there appeared on the steps leading from the parlour, side by side with Mrs. Meyrick, the Major himself.

‘I can’t see him, I can’t see him,’ exclaimed Matthew, vehemently. ‘I am not well enough this morning to see anybody.’

‘And you want a nurse,’ said Mary, gravely. ‘I don’t think I should be justified

in leaving you for any length of time—say, more than five minutes.’

‘I suppose he will stay to luncheon,’ sighed Matthew.

‘Your mother, of course, will have to ask him to do so. Here are we plotting to evade an unwelcome visitor with never a thought for the poor hostess, for whom there is no escape.’

‘Immediately, too, after one of us has made a solemn vow to abjure selfishness and lead a new life,’ added Matthew, penitently. ‘However, as one must stop somewhere, I suppose, even in a career of perfection, it is surely permissible to draw the line at Jefferson. But I do pity the dear mother.’

‘Perhaps she will find somebody to take him off her hands,’ said Mary, drily.

‘What, Roger? Never! He detests him even more than—I mean he has no better opinion of him than we have.’

‘No, not Roger. Look yonder.’

The Major, standing on the top step, had suddenly wheeled round, and, with beaming

smile, extended his hand to Miss Dart, whose face reflected the pleasure in his own.

‘Great Heavens!’ ejaculated Matthew.
‘Do you really mean to say she likes him?’

‘Most certainly she does; that is what makes me a little doubtful of her intuition. At first it made mamma doubtful of Lizzie; but it is only because she is hoodwinked and infatuated.’

‘It is impossible!’ ejaculated Matthew.

‘It is not only possible, but it is the case,’ answered Mary, earnestly. ‘Nor is it really to be wondered at. It is difficult for you and me to regard the matter from poor Lizzie’s point of view. He has made himself exceedingly agreeable ever since she came to us; and he can be very agreeable when he pleases; and, indeed, I really believe, so far as he is capable of affection for any one but himself, he is actually in love with her.’

‘But that makes it so much worse, I mean for her,’ exclaimed Matthew, mournfully. ‘It is shameful; it is cruel; why have you not opened her eyes to his real character?’

‘How little you know of our sex!’ replied Mary, gently. ‘That would be the very way to strengthen his position with her. Once or twice I have ventured to throw out a hint to her in the most delicate manner, but she has instantly darted away from the subject like a fish who sees the line in the sunshine. Don’t think me hard on dear Lizzie, Mat, for I like her as much as you do; except for this, there is the most perfect confidence between us; but indeed, indeed, she must find Jefferson out for herself.’

CHAPTER XXI.

AN UNWELCOME VISITOR.

EVENTS, like misfortunes, seldom come singly. The course of human life is that of a ship; most of it is passed on the wide ocean without a sail in sight, or an occurrence by which to mark a day. The storm and the leak and the wreck commonly come together, and the fair islands, at which we gladly touch, in clusters.

The letter from Mr. Argand formed an epoch in Elizabeth Dart's existence, and, indeed, promised to change the course of it. Such an incident might well have seemed sufficient to vary 'the level waste of rounded grey' that formed her life for many days to come, yet on the very morning on which it happened occurred Major Melburn's visit, an event much less unexpected but not inferior to it in interest.

She had come down from her room intending to join Mary in the Pavilion and to offer her congratulations to Matthew, when, on entering the dining-room, she saw Mrs. Meyrick standing at the open window with, as she thought, a stranger. But the Major, being on the look-out for her, had quicker eyes, and, before she could withdraw, addressed her. She felt the colour fly to her cheek as she returned his greeting, and her heart gave a flutter of joy. How handsome and pleasant he looked, and, in comparison with his hostess, as she could not help remarking, how completely at his ease. That Mrs. Meyrick and Matthew did not like him she had guessed from the silence they maintained about him ; in their case, since they were his blood relations, it was less explicable than in the case of Mrs. Melburn and her daughter, but doubtless they had espoused the latter's cause. But if the Major had been Mrs. Meyrick's favourite nephew he could not have appeared more at home with her. This complete self-possession, which Miss Dart had noticed more than once,

and under much more trying circumstances, had always excited her admiration.

She herself was by no means without self-command, but she knew her difficulties in maintaining it ; her nature was, indeed, exceedingly emotional, and such delicate organisations are attracted by their opposites as the needle by the iron. There could be no question, indeed, as to the attractive qualities of Major Melburn generally. Not even those most prejudiced against him could affect to wonder what any woman could see in him to admire. He was not only good-looking, which always goes for something with the female sex, though for not so much as with the male, but distinguished-looking. His air and manner were striking, and gave that suggestion of reserve force which it is so easy for those who are its possessors to exaggerate and magnify. Without giving the least impression of effort, he always seemed superior to his company. His store of information was in truth but scanty, yet he husbanded it and used it with such effect at the

right moment that it seemed ample. Of books, indeed, he professed to know but little—a very small blemish in Miss Dart's eyes, who had had some reason to doubt the excellences of mere learning ; but he exhibited a knowledge of life she the more admired, since it produced apparently an indifference to position and degree. It was to that, quite as much as to kindness of heart, that she set down his friendly behaviour to herself, and the equal footing on which he had placed her from the first. Her natural astuteness was not indeed blunted, but, as it were, sheathed, when she endeavoured to regard him critically, and even this was very seldom, for his friendly way disarmed her. Though dimly conscious of her own talents, she was free from personal vanity, and utterly unaccustomed to the attentions of the other sex. It never entered her mind that Major Melburn had been first attracted to her by her beauty, and that all 'other graces had followed in their proper places,' which, in his table of precedence, stood far below it.

It was one of those cases, rare in love affairs, where lookers-on see more of the game than the players, or, at all events, than one of them : and it was certainly no idle boast of Mary Melburn's that if she had pleased, or rather, if it had been judicious to do so, she could have opened her friend's eyes. It must be admitted, however, that Mary had known the Major's game for many years.

'Have you any news from Mrs. Melburn ?' inquired Miss Dart, a question which of itself betrayed the confusion of mind which his visit had produced in her ; for if she had had the power to think, and had not been moved merely by the desire to say something objective and apart from her own concerns, she would have known that he was the last person likely to be informed on such a matter. It was characteristic in him that instead of evading the inquiry he met it point blank.

'Well, the fact is,' he answered, smiling, 'my stepmother and I are not very constant correspondents ; I don't think, in fact, she has ever favoured me with a note in my life ;

and, as to the governor, his letters from abroad have all been addressed to the bailiff. You know his ways, Mrs. Meyrick ; he is always afraid of his land running away in his absence, though indeed that phenomenon is sometimes known to take place under the very eyes of its proprietor,' concluded the Major, cheerfully.

'Christopher always liked to look after things himself,' observed Mrs. Meyrick, apologetically. 'He has such a pride in the estate, because it has been in the family so long.'

'It is a pity it does not increase in value with time, like wine,' observed the Major, drily. 'All the landlords are being ruined, you know, Mrs. Meyrick.'

His tone was mildly explanatory, like that of a grown-up person addressing a child ; it was certainly not unkind, yet it seemed to affect the widow as though she had received a reproof.

'I do not doubt it, indeed, Jefferson,' she replied. 'Nevertheless, hard times are never so hard for the rich as for the poor.'

‘I am not so sure of that,’ he mused. ‘Poor people grow callous to their trouble, like the hand of toil.’

‘Like the much-smitten back to stripes, you should rather say,’ put in Miss Dart, quickly. ‘They are not to be less pitied, surely, because unmerited disaster pursues them with persistence.’

‘Certainly not,’ admitted the Major, gently. ‘I only meant in a vague way that sometimes the wind is tempered to the shorn lamb. Perhaps it isn’t ; it may be that it is only selfishness which causes us to minimise the troubles we do not share, or share in less degree.’

He looked so penitent that Miss Dart quite repented of her sharp rejoinder. If the Major was a little thoughtless, or at times exhibited too much of the harshness of the soldier, he always came to the right conclusion on reflection. If this change seemed to be effected by a gentle reminder from herself, it was not the less gratifying to her ; but the same result would, doubtless, have been

attained had any one else taken the trouble to question his views. As it happened, no one did take the trouble ; his position was, unfortunately, an isolated one ; and, indeed, it really seemed that no one understood him, or appreciated what was good in him, except herself. It was not vanity that caused her to arrive at this conclusion, but the testimony of his own words.

‘I dare say I am an unsatisfactory individual,’ he had once said to her ; ‘but it must be owned that there has not been much patience wasted on me at home.’ Miss Dart admitted to herself that the Major was not wholly satisfactory ; but she thought he might have been made so by more kind and judicious treatment, and pitied him. Though no one, as she had told him, had breathed a word against him to her, it was plain that he was a favourite with none of the family, either at Burrow Hall or at the Look-out. ‘Where is Mary ?’ he inquired, presently, of his hostess.

‘She is in the Pavilion, with Matthew. I

am not certain that he is well enough to-day to see a visitor.'

The tremulousness of poor Mrs. Meyrick's tone was touching. It was plain that her simple nature was very ill-qualified for deception ; but Matthew did *so* dislike Jefferson, and it was so important that the invalid should not be irritated or distressed. Her embarrassment, however, did not at the moment attract Miss Dart's attention so much as the laconic and unsympathetic character of her reply. Mrs. Meyrick, she knew, was incapable of hardness in the ordinary sense ; and yet it was hard, when a brother asked after a sister, whom presumably, too, he had come over expressly to see, for her, in indirect but still unmistakable terms, to be denied him. The Major smiled, with a half-glance at the governess, which seemed to say, ' You see how they treat me,' and answered, quietly, ' I was in hopes she might be induced to take a turn with me on the pier.'

' You will see her at luncheon, you know,' said Mrs. Meyrick, doubtfully.

‘I cannot stay for luncheon,’ was his dry rejoinder ; ‘and, besides, I wanted to say a few words to her in private. Perhaps you will kindly tell her that ?’

Mrs. Meyrick assented by a nod, and at once went off to the Pavilion ; but with a look that by no means boded hopefully for the success of her mission.

‘It is charming to find oneself so beloved by one’s family, is it not, Miss Dart ?’ said the Major, laughing, as soon as they were left alone.

‘If I thought what I conclude you mean,’ she answered, gravely, ‘I should think it no laughing matter.’

‘But, then, I am used to be snubbed.. When I remarked, just now, that the experience of calamity produced philosophy, I was severely reproved for it ; but there is really something in it.’

‘I have no doubt your sister will come out with you,’ said Miss Dart, ‘or, at all events, give you that opportunity of speaking to her which you desire.’

There was a scholastic ring in the sentence, always observable in Miss Dart's utterances when they were of an artificial kind. She had not quite the confidence in Mary's acquiescence which she had expressed ; but it seemed so necessary to say something conciliatory and calculated to make matters less unpleasant.

'You are very sanguine,' he answered, quietly. 'I know all these good people better than you do. It does not seem much to ask, it is true ; but you will see that it is too much.'

'Let us hope not.'

'By all means. If, however, my view turns out to be the correct one, may I venture to ask the same favour of yourself—namely, five minutes' private conversation ? What I have to say to Mary,' he went on, hurriedly, perceiving his companion looked embarrassed, 'can be said to her with equal force by a third person ; but it is most important that it should be said. Mrs. Meyrick is coming back to us. If the reply is "Nay," will you be at the pier-head in twenty minutes

or so ?—it is the only means I have of getting speech with you.'

If he had proposed a meeting on their own account, it was probable Miss Dart would have declined it, though she had as little of the prude about her as of the flirt, but she could hardly refuse to act as intermediary between Mary and himself; even if he had exaggerated the importance of what he had to say, she might still, in declining to hear it, be throwing away the chance of reuniting brother and sister, or at least of bringing them to a better understanding of one another.

It was easy to read on Mrs. Meyrick's face that the Major had been a true prophet, before she faltered forth how grieved she was to say 'that it was one of dear Matthew's bad mornings, and that Mary could not be persuaded to leave him.'

'I am sorry,' said the Major, quietly. 'I wish that I could add that I am disappointed. Save for the pleasure of seeing you, Aunt Louisa, it seems that I have had my ride for nothing.'

‘It is most unfortunate,’ murmured poor Mrs. Meyrick. ‘You will surely, however, have some lunch?’

‘Thank you; no. I have a friend stopping with me at home, whom I ought not to desert longer than is absolutely necessary.’

His hostess did not press the matter; she even unconsciously uttered a sigh of relief. As the Major took Miss Dart’s hand, he said, in a low voice, ‘You will not fail me?’ His face looked so eager and so tender (as she had seen it only once before) as he bent over her, that she half repented of the promise she had given him; nevertheless, she answered, ‘I will come.’

CHAPTER XXII.

ON THE PIER.

It is universally admitted when the time seems to have arrived, through misfortune or evil report, for one's friends to 'rally round one,' that, as a rule, they do not rally. Nevertheless, that is the occasion that a woman who entertains a tenderness for a man always seizes to show it. She is not content with holding herself apart from those who traduce him, or declining to listen to their insinuations, but she runs up to him as she never did before, and, placing her hand in his, in sign, not of love, as she flatters herself, but of friendship, exclaims, 'I do not believe one word of what these people say.'

The refusal of Mary Melburn to give her brother an interview, though not unintelligible to Miss Dart, seemed very inexcusable, while

the whole character of his reception at the Look-out struck her as cold and cruel. Like most persons who have not mixed much with the world, or had the opportunity of contracting friendship, the ties of blood had, in her eyes, an exaggerated importance. The only person who was related to her was also her best friend ; the circumstance seemed only natural and in accordance with the fitness of things ; and that Mrs. Meyrick should have received her nephew with such manifest want of cordiality, and that his sister should have point-blank refused to see him at all, was absolutely shocking to her. Indignation at their conduct evoked in her a strong sympathy as well as compassion for the victim, and, as she was only too conscious, at the same time intensified her feeling of personal regard for him. That we are ignorant of our characters is a maxim sufficiently flavoured with paradox, but that we should be ignorant of our own motives is almost a contradiction in terms.

Nevertheless, it was without the least

sense of doing anything clandestine, or contrary to maidenly propriety, that Elizabeth Dart took her way to the little pier. The very dependence of her position gave her an independence of action, and what would have been little short of audacious in the girl was only a bold step in the governess.

The pier at Casterton was by no means one of those elaborate erections to which the visitors at our fashionable seaside resorts are so accustomed ; it had no spacious promenade with its concert-room, or at least its pavilion for the band, no shields of glass to let in the light and exclude the wind, no light and elegant roof to keep off the sun or rain. It was short and thick and ugly, built of solid stone, and furnished with a rough bench or two, which those who were so fortunate as to secure dragged hither and thither, into coigns of vantage according to the direction of the wind.

On one of these she found the Major sitting with his umbrella up, for rain drops were falling ; and it was only natural she

should partake of its shelter, a simple arrangement which gives the impression of isolation to the persons concerned. The ostrich with his head in the sand derives, no doubt, a similar satisfaction from his seclusion, however partial or inadequate. It must be added, however, that while the female bird on this occasion seemed to entertain no apprehension, the male bird occasionally popped his head out and kept a sharp look out on passers-by.

‘How kind of you it is, Miss Dart,’ he murmured, tenderly, ‘to give me this opportunity of speaking to you.’

‘It is only my duty, Major Melburn, to do so,’ was her reply. ‘If what you have to say concerns your sister so nearly, she ought to be informed of it.’

This rejoinder did not seem to please her companion, though there was a certain unnecessary quiet and deliberation in its tone which belied its words. When we have no suspicion of danger we do not put on our armour.

‘You are very good to take such an

interest in her,' he answered, gently. 'I venture to believe that it extends more or less to all of us. Under ordinary circumstances, and considering the short time you have been with us, it would be impossible to repose the confidence in you which I am about to show ; but somehow—I hardly know how, though I feel it—you have won the right to learn everything from my lips that concerns ourselves.'

Miss Dart moved her head in tacit acknowledgment of the compliment ; perhaps she was a little mistrustful of having her voice completely under control.

'I am sure,' he went on, 'that you will treat whatever I say as confidential, and that, however much you may differ from me as to the course of conduct Mary should pursue, you will give me credit for good intentions.'

'You may take so much for granted, Major Melburn.'

'Now, I dare say you think, from our mode of life at Burrow Hall, that we are rich

people ? Well, that is not the case. The estate is encumbered, and my father is in pecuniary straits.'

'I am both sorry and surprised to hear it.'

'I knew you would be ; the matter does not concern me so much, because I have some money of my own from my mother, and, of course, my pay ; but the fact is, that on my father's death—and perhaps before, for one cannot keep up appearances for ever—Mary will be very ill-off indeed. You know what sort of man my father is—as proud as Lucifer, and very reserved about his own affairs. She therefore suspects nothing of this. I think it unfair to her ; but still, I am not justified in revealing to her what he has thought proper to conceal. It was my intention, however, if she had given me the opportunity, to hint at the true state of affairs. You will know, Miss Dart, better than I whether Mary is qualified, in case things come to the worst, to gain her own living, as you yourself do, for example.'

‘What ! As a governess ? You don’t mean to tell me things will be as bad as that?’

Miss Dart was greatly disturbed, and sat with down-drooped eyes reflecting on the evil tidings. At the sound of an approaching footstep the Major’s head emerged from its shelter like that of a turtle from its shell ; a shambling figure in an ulster was making his way up the little pier against the wind and rain. As he neared them, he caught sight of the Major’s face, which was full of discouragement and menace. The new-comer was about to speak, but such fury flashed from the other’s eyes that he altered his purpose, and with a shrug of his shoulders turned upon his heel and retraced his steps. The Major drew a breath of relief which, to judge by his countenance, was, however, unmingled with thankfulness, and rejoined his companion in her silken bower.

‘I gather from your tone, my dear Miss Dart,’ he said, ‘that you have no great opinion of Mary’s qualifications as a teacher ;

the position requires training, mental discipline.'

'How can you talk in that cold way!' she broke forth indignantly. 'You know how your sister has been brought up, and that her undertaking anything of the sort is an impossibility.'

'Nevertheless, you must not be angry with me, Miss Dart, who am not answerable for her imperfections.'

'I am not angry with you, upon that account at least,' she added, after a moment's hesitation.

'I see,' he answered, quietly; 'you are angry with me because, having confessed to possessing means of my own, I do not offer to share them with my half-sister. I think, considering the sentiments she entertains towards me, which are proved by her conduct this very morning, that such an expectation is unreasonable. I hope I am not less generous than other people, or more bitter against my enemies. I should certainly be willing to make her an allowance, which it

is quite as certain, however, she would never accept—no, not if she were starving. You know that as well as I do.’

Miss Dart did know it, and was silent.

‘All this is very disagreeable,’ he continued; ‘but it is absolutely necessary that you should be acquainted with the real state of the case. A chance—most people would call it a great stroke of luck, but I wish to stick to facts—a chance, I say, is offered to Mary of escaping from her troubles, and establishing herself in even a better position than she is now supposed to occupy. The gentleman may not be quite to her taste—he has his weaknesses, I admit, as most of us have—but there is no reason why he should not make her a good husband.’

‘Do you mean Mr. Winthrop?’ put in Miss Dart, coldly.

‘Yes. You need not tell me that he is no favourite of yours; but this is not a question of favourites. It is a case of position and comfort versus poverty and no home.’

‘And what would you have me do, since

I am not allowed, it seems, to reveal to her the whole truth?’

‘I would ask you to hint at it; and if you will not put in a word for Winthrop—of whose merits or demerits you will forgive me for saying you can scarcely be a judge—at all events not to increase her prejudice against him.’

‘It is not necessary to increase it, Major Melburn,’ was the icy reply, and there was deep disappointment in its tone, as well as displeasure. ‘No girl who had any respect for herself could entertain any warmth of feeling for that person; unless, indeed, it were indignation. No; I am sorry that I cannot oblige you in this matter, but sorrier still that you should have asked me to do so. If, as you suggest, I have had but few opportunities of learning Mr. Winthrop’s character, that is not the case with *you*. Would you have your sister marry a drunkard?’

‘That is a harsh term to apply to a man because he gives way to an occasional weakness.’

‘I am not going to argue the matter ; I will only say that in my eyes there is no advantage the world can give that could weigh against such a vice in a husband. I have drunk from the cup of poverty all my life, and know its bitterness ; but welcome want itself with all its humiliations in preference to such a fate.’

‘ You are right, Miss Dart,’ was the unexpected reply, delivered with enthusiastic vehemence. ‘ I have said my last word upon this subject, and will never allude to it again. Do not be angry with me for having performed what seemed to me a duty, till you convinced me to the contrary. A man thinks of these matters so differently from a woman, though he does not often find such a woman as you to set him right. What, after all, is a union without love, though it is endowed with all things else ? What, indeed, are conventional advantages of any kind compared with the emotions of the heart ? Dear Miss Dart, I am ashamed of myself.’

‘ If you thought you were right, there is

no need for shame,' she answered, gently. Her voice trembled a little, she was touched by his frank contrition.

'Golden words, golden words,' he murmured, approvingly. 'Our own conscience, as you say, is the highest law. What matters what the world says or what it thinks, or what conventionality enjoins, if only we obey the dictates of our hearts? Miss Dart, you see before you an unworthy man—one of whom you have doubtless heard much ill.'

'Not a word,' she put in, huskily. It seemed to her that her power of speech was somehow paralysed. Though she heard every word that was addressed to her, nor missed so much as the inflection of a tone, her brain was in a tumult.

'If you have not heard, you will hear,' he went on, with tender earnestness; 'and much that is said to my disadvantage will be true. My mother died before I knew her. You know what sort of father I have. His second marriage did not improve matters so far as

I was concerned: there are certain jealousies and antagonisms, as you must have perceived. A man without a home is always in peril. I have often done amiss in many ways. Still I am not utterly worthless.'

'I am quite sure of that,' she whispered, consolingly. She was trembling in every limb.

'I should not be so sure were it not for the feelings I entertain towards yourself,' he continued, gravely. 'There must be something good in a man who recognises goodness, gentleness, and unconventional affection in another. In you I have found all these.'

She shook her head, but very gently. She was afraid of shaking the tears from her eyes.

'Yes, my dear Miss Dart, in you I seem to see my ideal.'

'I must not listen to this,' she murmured, making an effort to rise.

'One moment,' he said, laying his hand upon her own, 'and then I shall have done. I will tell you why you think you must not

listen ; because, forsooth, you happen to be poor and I have a competency ; because I am the son of the house to which you have come as a dependant. If I were a lad of twenty there might be some reason in such scruples. You might then be afraid lest some fool should say of you that you were a designing girl. There is no such thing—as compared with the men who are called their victims—as a designing girl ; that is a story the hawks have invented against the doves. But in my case such a representation would be ludicrous indeed. Moreover, in uniting your lot with mine you injure no one. My fortune, such as it is, is my own ; while for taking me away from my belongings it is certain you will get nothing but thanks. These considerations, it is true, will be superfluous if my proposition itself should be distasteful to you. I am only doing the best for myself by clearing away obstructions. I want a “clear field” ; though, alas ! I cannot add “and no favour.” If I am tried on my merits, my chance is poor indeed. Do you think it possible, my dear Miss Dart,

that, in spite of my faults, you could ever love me?'

He had never let go of her hand, and she no longer struggled, as she had done at first, to escape from his grasp. Her very soul was in a tumult, but its predominant emotion was one of joy. She no longer attempted to conceal from herself that she loved this man; and he was her first love. No man had ever spoken to her of love before. He had anticipated the very objections which had at once occurred to her, and in a great measure had removed them. She felt that she knew but little of him, and called to mind a score of wise reflections she had read concerning the perils of haste under the like circumstances; but like all recorded experiences of other people, they seemed to have little reference to her particular case. The position of every one of us appears exceptional when our feelings prompt us to make light of a general rule.

'I know so little of you, Major Melburn,' she said; but she felt that the plea was only

in arrest of judgment; that if not now, then to-morrow—if not to-morrow, the next day—she would have to answer him more directly and in the affirmative.

‘That is fortunate for me,’ he answered, smiling; ‘for it is only since I have seen you, and been under your good influence, that I have been worth much. I must entreat you to judge me rather by my future than my past; and especially from your own observation rather than from hearsay. I am like the early Christians in one respect, at all events—that my foes are those of my own household. I cannot say I do not wish to hurry your decision, for I would give half of what remains to me of life to call you my own to-day; but I am willing to wait and hope. May I venture, dear girl, to ask that much?’

‘I will think over what you have said,’ she answered, with tolerable firmness; ‘and at all events, be assured that I am grateful—deeply grateful.’

‘No,’ he put in, decisively; ‘you must not say that. Do not suppose that I am

such a fool as to mistake on which side the obligation lies. It is possible the world may think otherwise, but even *I* am not of the world in some things; while you, if I judge you rightly, you despise its judgments, and respect even its laws only when they are in consonance with your sense of what is right. Nevertheless, as you would say'—for Miss Dart was about to speak—'we cannot always act independently of its opinion. It is that which makes caution absolutely necessary in our case. Even if you had consented to make me happy at once, instead of taking my proposal into your consideration, I should still have asked of you to conceal the affair for the present. I need not point out to you how disadvantageously, from the prejudice that exists against me, the suspicion of any engagement between us would affect your relations with your friends at the Look-out, or what a complication would ensue on your return to Burrow Hall. From what you know of me, I think you will admit that I am by nature frank enough; I abhor anything

clandestine as much as you do ; but until the time is ripe I must entreat you to keep our secret.'

'There is no secret to keep, at present, Major Melburn.'

'I know it,' he put in, quickly ; 'though it is cruel to remind me of it ; I only feared, supposing your heart should respond to mine, lest you might (as girls, I have heard, do under such circumstances) take Mary into your confidence.'

'That is only where there is sympathy,' answered Miss Dart, gravely. 'Be sure I should never breathe your name to any one who was not friendly to you. Even now, indeed, for that very reason, it is a sealed subject between your sister and myself.'

He glanced at her with swift approval, and something more ; from the expression of his eager eyes she was reminded that in mentioning that very reticence she had made a serious admission. Unlike many of her sex and age, she was not, however, one to take pleasure in concealing her liking. She was

willing enough to let her companion know that she looked upon him as a friend, and, indeed, she found it difficult to restrain herself from being still more frank. He had, it was true, given her time for reflection before accepting his suit, but she well knew that in this he ran no risks. Her heart was already in his keeping.

‘I shall write no line, dear girl,’ he said, ‘for that would be dangerous, but I shall expect one, just one, from *you*. In the meantime, Heaven bless and keep you!’

His grasp tightened on her hand, his face came very close to hers ; but he drew back with a sigh.

‘It is time for us to part,’ he murmured, sadly. ‘Your absence from home will be noticed. Stay,’ he added, hurriedly, ‘you must make no secret of our having met ; for that old astrologer yonder has caught sight of us. You may say, what is true enough, that I was pleading for Winthrop, and in vain.’

He rose and lifted his hat, like one who has met a lady casually, and is taking leave,

and quietly strolled down the pier, past Roger Leyden, who, apparently engaged with a spyglass in watching the shipping, never turned his head as he went by.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE CONFEDERATES.

THERE are occasions when one wishes even our best friends a little farther off; and just now, Elizabeth Dart would have preferred Roger Leyden to have been rubbing up the coins in his museum, or speculating on Danish stock (in the shape of hidden treasure) upon the mound of Battle Hill, rather than standing where he was, at the entrance of the little pier, where she must needs pass close by him to re-enter the town. However, it was already luncheon time, and her absence would begin to excite, not only surprise, but anxiety, at home; so she got up, and, with as indifferent an air as she could assume, commenced her retreat. With such an uninterrupted interest did Mr. Leyden continue to regard the ships in the offing that she almost

hoped to pass him without notice ; but as she came exactly opposite to him he brought his glass to bear on her (at three feet off, or so), and shut it up with such a vicious snap that, in her state of nervous tension, she could scarcely refrain from uttering a cry of alarm. She not only did refrain from it, however, but contrived to assume a tone of unconcern, as she observed—

‘ You seem to have found some object of great attraction for your telescope this morning, Mr. Leyden.’

‘ That is so,’ he answered, grimly ; ‘ I was watching a piratical craft which is but seldom seen in these latitudes. What excited my curiosity was her carrying sail when there was no occasion for it—nothing is more ridiculous than to see a man sitting under an umbrella when there is no rain : if, however, he has a female companion at his side, the circumstance may be accounted for.’

Miss Dart mechanically looked up at the sky, which was serene and unclouded.

‘ It has been like that this half-hour,’

remarked her persecutor, drily. She was annoyed at the observations he had made, of course ; but somehow she was not offended. She was not altogether displeased, perhaps, that the secrecy which had been imposed upon her, as respected any understanding between herself and the Major, should thus be rendered impossible, and through no fault of her own. All clandestine proceedings were distasteful to her—she already repented of having so easily fallen into the Major's views in that respect ; and then she was so certain of the antiquary's goodwill that it was difficult to be angry with him.

‘I see nothing very remarkable, Mr. Leyden,’ she said, quietly, ‘in sitting by a gentleman's side with whom I am well acquainted, even though it be under an umbrella ; and I am by no means inclined to admit, even though it were a phenomenon, that I owe you any explanation of it. I may say, however, that I came here at Major Melburn's own invitation to discuss a matter of great importance concerning his sister.’

‘I know all that. He wanted to persuade you to advocate Mr. Winthrop’s pretensions, which you very properly declined to do. It is astonishing,’ he added, musingly, ‘how wise and prudent we often are in matters affecting other people ; whereas in our own concerns we are prone to lose our heads, and sometimes even our hearts.’

‘Very true, no doubt, Mr. Leyden ; but syllogisms can be listened to at any time, while potatoes must be eaten whilst they are hot. It is already past luncheon time, so I must say good-bye.’

‘Take care what else you say good-bye to, my dear young lady,’ he murmured, solemnly. ‘I know, as you say, that I have no right to pry into your affairs ; but if, as I fear, your thoughts are tending in a certain direction, I beseech you to restrain them while you have still the power ; for that way madness lies.’

‘You have been consulting the stars again,’ returned Miss Dart, scornfully.

‘The stars are not to be despised,’ he answered, gravely ; ‘but it is not in the blue

vault of heaven that one would look for any record of Jefferson Melburn.'

'Why did you not tell him what you thought of him just now, instead of slandering him behind his back?' inquired Elizabeth Dart, in tones that trembled with anger.

'Because, for one thing, he knows it; and for the other, my opinion would not weigh with him one feather.'

'It weighs as lightly, sir, with me,' returned the girl, contemptuously, and, with flashing eyes, passed on into the town.

'Now have you done more harm than good, Roger Leyden,' was the antiquary's muttered self-reproach, as he watched her retreating figure, its step firmer than usual, and its head thrown slightly back, as if in defiance. '“There's no fool like an old fool” is at its truest in matters of love: I ought to have known that a girl of spirit would resent any cheapening of her bargain in the way of a sweetheart, even though he were the most worthless lot in the market. When I told her that I knew what the fellow had been

talking about (no difficult matter to arrive at since I saw his friend Winthrop himself, awaiting his fate, no doubt, at the door of "The Welcome"), and also what answer she had given him (easy enough for any one who knows her keen intelligence and honest heart to guess), I thought that I had impressed her with my knowledge of human nature, but directly I came to speak of the Major himself she became a very Thomas in disbelief. I ought to have known—I ought to have remembered, that is—that it would be so. Moreover, it was folly to anger her, since the thing will never be. The stars have said it. What! with her sun nine times bigger than the true sun, and all the twelve signs, but Pisces (which only shows that she will never be a shipowner), to suppose that she will marry a spendthrift and a ne'er-do-well like Jefferson Melburn! No. I wonder how her wealth will come to her—"Wealth," as old Samuel called it, "beyond the dreams of Avarice"—for somehow it will come? Perhaps she will turn out to be heiress of long-

forgotten and ownerless millions, the last of an ancient race, whose line has been swallowed up as the river by the sand, only to appear again in a dry place. And yet she is too masterful and wise (save in one matter) to have come from a worn-out stock of any kind—a very remarkable young woman, and not for you, Master Melburn, you may take my word for it ; nor for any of your kind.’

The object of this uncomplimentary prophecy had, in the meantime, betaken himself to ‘The Welcome,’ the only inn which Casterton boasted. It stood in the middle of the little High-street, a spot of such unexceptionable advantage that a vehicle could, with skill and judgment, be turned round before its doors without the intrusion of the horse’s head into the windows opposite. It was furnished with a portico that could afford shelter, till admittance could be gained within, to at least two persons, and with balconies, containing in summer time each three flower-pots, which gave it upon market-days quite a distinguished and gay appear-

ance. The rooms were exquisitely clean ; but their bulging ceilings hung so low that the laws of politeness were taught, perforce, to any guest of moderate height who was inclined to keep his hat on within doors. In the front parlour, upon so short a sofa that he had to supplement it with a chair for the accommodation of his legs, reclined a gentleman with a cigar in his mouth, and a glass of brandy-and-water on a table by his side. In spite of his luxurious position and its concomitants, he appeared by no means at his ease. His brow was knitted, his face was gloomy, his white lips showed where his discoloured teeth had pressed upon them, and he had all the appearance of a gentleman in the sulks—an indisposition which even repeated doses of brandy-and-water have been rarely known to ameliorate.

To him entered Major Melburn, radiant from the result of an interview, and cheerful in the contemplation of his own affairs.

‘ You have good news, then, after all, Jeff?’ exclaimed Winthrop, raising himself

upon his elbow, and sticking his glass into his eye.

‘Well, no, I am afraid I can hardly say that; but that is not my fault. How deuced imprudent it was of you to show yourself just now on the pier!’

‘Why, you yourself told me to go there.’

‘That was, of course, supposing my sister had been with me; but when you saw that it was not she—that you could not carry matters by a *coup de main*, as we had hoped—you should surely have known better than to intrude yourself. I am sure I frowned at you enough; and if you had had any sense, you would have made yourself scarce at once.’

‘Sense? I suppose you think no one has any sense but yourself?’ returned the other, angrily. ‘I may not have your oily tongue, and your slippery ways, but I have eyes in my head, like other people. I could see that it was not on my affairs that you were talking so confidently with your friend, Miss Dart. You are playing the old game, are you? Only this time you have nothing to lose.’

The radiance had departed from the Major's face at the first words of his companion ; but now it grew black as thunder.

‘ You had better leave me and Miss Dart to settle our own affairs, my friend,’ he said, in a voice hoarse with suppressed passion, and very menacing.

‘ By all means. You may make just as great a fool of her as you like ; but you shall no longer make a fool of me.’

The Major smiled contemptuously, as though any operation of that kind from without was a work of supererogation, but his white face and trembling hands betrayed the constraint he was putting on himself.

‘ I have done my best for you, and will continue to do it,’ he replied, ‘ in spite of your own folly, which checks me at every turn. Brandy at midday in a country inn, where every servant is a tatter ! Had Mary been where you expected to find her, you would have addressed her with breath reeking of it ! As well have said, “ I love you, but I love

Drink better." How *can* you be so mad, Winthrop !'

'Never you mind me and my brandy,' returned the other, in dogged but less defiant tones. At first, Mr. Winthrop had been disposed for battle, but he was now inclined to act on the defensive only; the stronger will was beginning to tell.

'Now, it is quite ridiculous for you and me to quarrel, Winny,' exclaimed the Major, frankly, but with a somewhat grating laugh. 'It only gives us the trouble of making it up again. You know the old proverb, "*Aman-tium iræ*," &c?'

'Yes; I know the proverb about quarrelling, if that's what you mean. If it makes honest folk come by their own, I can't say that I should object to a little disagreement.'

This reply was one of that nature for which the philosophers tell us we should always be prepared—namely, the unexpected; and it took the Major—who was far from being a philosopher—very much aback. It was not surprising to him that Winthrop's

muddled brain should have got two proverbs of certainly very different import so ludicrously mixed, but that his thoughts should have shot to the subject of coming by one's own, or, in other words, of getting one's borrowed money back, on such very slight suggestion. It was clear to him that the question was accustomed to present itself to Mr. Winthrop's mind much oftener and with much more importunity than he had heretofore imagined. It was disgusting that a fellow whom one had admitted to one's friendship, though intellectually so unworthy of it, and even called 'Winny' when one wished to be especially conciliatory, should turn against one in this manner. In the highest and noblest sense, the obligation lay no doubt on Mr. Winthrop's side ; but as a mere matter of finance, the other was his debtor.

'You shall be paid, sir, in meal or in malt, never fear,' said the Major, haughtily.

'Yes ; but I'm beginning to think that I had rather have it in money,' was the unvarnished reply. In any other man's mouth such

a rejoinder would have been an epigram, and could have been parried with a smile, but the force of it in the present case lay in its absolute simplicity and matter of fact, which admitted of no such evasion. What it meant (as the Major was well aware) was, 'I'm getting tired of being fobbed off and fobbed off with the promise of your sister's hand, and would rather see those five hundred pounds back which I lent to you on that which I now think to be very doubtful security.'

'I say again that you shall be paid, or rather that you shall receive what you have agreed to consider an equivalent for payment.'

'And I say again that I prefer cash down.'

'Don't make me angry,' said the Major, hoarsely: 'that can't do you any good. It is sheer nonsense to talk to me of cash payments, and you know it: you can't get blood from a stone.'

'Oh yes, you can, if you know how to squeeze it,' returned the other, cunningly, sipping at his brandy-and-water. 'Even a

stone has a tender place sometimes. Suppose I was to tell the pretty governess—— I say, what the devil are you at !’

With a quick movement of his arm the Major had thrust aside the table and made a grab at his companion’s throat. Mr. Winthrop mechanically put his knee up, so that the other’s hand fell short of its intent. That last insult, a blow—or its equivalent, which once having passed between grown men makes reconciliation impossible—had therefore been arrested. Though murder itself looked forth from the Major’s face, he was conscious that his boats had been saved from burning, and was even ‘thankful’ for it (though it would, perhaps, have puzzled him to say to whom). Even in the words that passion compelled his mouth to utter there was a certain *locus penitentiæ* for the man who provoked him ; as though some mad elephant, turning to rend its keeper, at the same time should point to the corner of its den, where the little spiral staircase affords a shelter from its fury.

‘If you dare to speak what was just now

on the tip of your tongue to her or to any living creature, so help me, Heaven, I will kill you! How can you, *can* you be so mad as to threaten it? Promise me, promise before you speak another word, that you will never do it. Can anything be so cowardly, or such a breach of confidence between man and man?’

‘You needn’t make such a fuss,’ said Winthrop, white and trembling, at least as much with rage as fear. By nature he was no coward; but his nerves, weakened by his own excesses, had given way under the unexpected strain upon them, and the consciousness of the fact filled him with resentment. ‘A fellow may say, “suppose I were to do so-and-so,” I conclude, without intending to do it. I am as much a man of honour, let me tell you, as yourself.’

The claim—and, to say the truth, it was not an extravagant one—was admitted at once.

‘Of course you are, Winthrop; and when you are not in drink there is no better fellow

in the world. It is that cursed stuff yonder,' he pointed to the floor, where lay the glass and its contents, 'that has been the cause of all this. Your blood might have been spilt along with it, or mine,' he added, quickly, for he felt it was uncomplimentary to take it for granted that a personal contest could only have had one result. 'Well, thank Heaven, it can all be wiped up with a dish-cloth. I am very sorry I lost my temper, Winny.'

'Well, well, it's all right so far,' muttered the other, ungraciously; for one who has been frightened, and is ashamed of it, does not easily forgive; 'but I am sick of these delays and adjournments. Why was not Mary on the pier, as you promised she should be?'

'That wretched Matthew has one of his bad days, as they call it—it's a pity his days don't come to an end—and she was unable to leave him. As to delays, the thing can't hang on much longer. The news from Germany, the other day, makes it certain that Mrs. Melburn's case is hopeless.'

‘That I have been told, any time during the last six months,’ observed the other, drily.

‘True ; but it is now not only a question of time, but of a very short time. It is Mrs. Melburn who prejudices Mary against you, and what a dangerous enemy she can be I have myself reason to know. When she is gone you will meet with no obstacle save a little coyness, which a man of your mettle should have no difficulty in overcoming. Unlike her mother, Mary is like wax, and can be moulded as you please. You will be a husband who has his own way.’

‘She’s a sweet pretty girl, no doubt,’ admitted Winthrop ; ‘but I suppose we shall have to wait three months or so,’ he added, ‘fully, for the funeral and that.’

‘Not at all,’ returned the Major, confidently. ‘My father and Mary will go to some out-of-the-way place for a change, and then you two can be married quietly, and at once.’

‘Oh, as quiet as you please,’ returned the other, with a chuckle. ‘I suppose I could

not see her just now,' murmured the amorous swain, 'not even for a minute !'

'Not to-day ; we'll try again in a week or two. It is quite possible that I may then use such arguments with her as may induce her to make you a happy man much earlier than you think for.'

'Very good. The sooner I tear up that little I O U of yours, Jeff, the better for both of us. There are our horses at the door. Now, just one stirrup-cup, and then for the saddle.'

'Not one drop shall you drink more. Even now, when you get into the open air, you will feel that you have had too much.'

Winthrop muttered a remonstrance in the concise form of an execration, but he submitted. The Major's strong will had once more regained its supremacy. No trace of their late quarrel could be observed in either of them as they went downstairs together and mounted their horses. There are many so-called friendships in the world which exist on similar conditions ; as long as the tie of

self-interest binds them, natures even the most discordant and even lawless—though the breaches that at times of necessity take place between them are neither forgiven nor forgotten—will yet hold together.

The two gentlemen were both well mounted, and on ordinary occasions it would have been difficult to say which had the better seat : a man, however, may be too much at his ease in the saddle.

‘I wish,’ said the Major, grimly, as they rode along the stony causeway, ‘that you would take your hands out of your pockets.’

‘What does it signify ? One isn’t in the Row,’ returned the other, testily.

‘That’s just it. If you were there it wouldn’t so much matter ; but if you fell off here, you’d break your neck.’

‘What a rum fellow you are, Jeff !’ said Mr. Winthrop ; but he gathered up his reins at once, and sat as stiff as the Great Duke (though with considerably more of effort) till they reached the downs.

CHAPTER XXIV.

TITANIA.

A GOOD deal too much has been made, in my opinion, of the alteration in a man's character and conduct when he first falls in love ; but as regards a girl, the change can scarcely be exaggerated. All things seem literally to have become new with her, and she regards the whole world from a different standpoint from that which she occupied before. She sees everything double ; not, indeed, in duplicate, but through her own eyes, and through the eyes of the beloved object. His prejudices, or what she used to consider such, begin to have some show of reason ; his faults to assume the appearance of virtues. The very class to which he belongs, if it differs from her own, is credited with merits to which she has hitherto been blind. The thought of him

monopolises her mind and ousts all others. In most cases there is some confidante of her own sex, to whom she discourses of him, and in whom she finds a sympathy which man (to whom a love-tale is intolerable) denies to man under the like circumstances.

To Elizabeth Dart no such safety-valve for the emotions was vouchsafed. She had to bear her bliss alone, as she had so often borne her woe.

That precaution of taking time to make up her mind as to whether she would accept the Major's offer or no was, she well knew, a mere formula : her heart had been his for the asking, almost from the first. If it be asked, how was it that so very intelligent and sagacious a young woman should have made such a choice, our reply is—*circumspice*. One has only to look next door, or over the way, to see the parallel.

Long afterwards, and when the subject of their conversation had become a personage, I remember hearing two great ladies talking of this very matter. 'Beyond good looks and a

pleasant manner,' said one, 'what was there in Major Melburn to have attracted such a woman ?'

'My dear, she saw nothing in him ; she only thought she saw, as Titania did when she called the ass her "gentle joy." Her genius idealised him.'

'The Major, however, was not an ass,' argued the other : 'he was another sort of animal altogether, and in some ways of a far inferior type.'

'That is quite true, but he was the first gentleman with whom she had ever been on equal terms.'

This last remark, though made by one who had but a conventional notion of what constitutes a gentleman, had a great deal of truth in it. The class to which the Major belonged had hitherto been viewed by Elizabeth Dart only at a distance ; its attractions were unknown to her, and what merits belonged to the type she attributed to the individual. It was like a stranger to the game watching two *habitués* at billiards ; he will hear them make many

remarks upon the incidents of play, and be persuaded that they have a good deal of wit about them; whereas everything they say in that way, if he had had their opportunity of observation, he would know is said five thousand times a year on precisely the same occasions. The gloss of politeness, the veneer of chivalry, which the Major possessed, in common with the whole caste to which he belonged, seemed not only genuine, and the evidence of a noble nature, but as something peculiar to himself. Experience she had none; and in this case her intuition failed her because of her great liking for the man. In love-matters there is good reason to suppose, from his biography, that even Shakspeare was not quite judicious; and the true reason that causes philosophers to make light of love is not because it is illogical, but because it is inexplicable to them and their theories. What showed the pre-occupation of Miss Dart's mind, perhaps, beyond all other signs, was that, save a grateful acknowledgment of his letter, she opened no communications with Mr. Argand. That

concentration of mind was wanting which is necessary to literary effort. Instead of thinking, she took to dreaming. This, however, was only as regarded her own affairs. The calls of duty and friendship were in no way disregarded.

To Matthew she was invaluable, in selecting such of his poems as were most suitable for publication in the 'Parthenon,' and in suggesting improvements. It was amazing to see how his spirits rose with success, and, if even his physical ailment derived no benefit from it, it seemed to do so from his having something else to think about. In her relations with Matthew, Miss Dart had looked for little change in consequence of what had happened as regarded the Major; but in Mary's case she had feared there would be coldness, or at least a withdrawal of confidence. It was a subject that could not be debated, or on which any new conclusion could be arrived at; the more frank the girl was about it, the worse she knew it must be for herself; and yet it could hardly be ignored.

It was not Mary's silence, therefore, but the continuance of matters on the old footing that convinced Miss Dart that her secret remained undivulged. When the first moment of indignation against Roger Leyden had passed away, she had forgiven him—as perhaps she could have forgiven nobody else—for his words of warning. Her sense of justice compelled her to acknowledge his good intentions, and to make allowance for the outspoken and candid nature of the man ; and now she was deeply touched by his keeping what he had discovered, and so greatly disapproved of, to himself. It would have been, perhaps, beyond the powers of woman to maintain a similar reticence, under like circumstances. He never referred to it, even to herself. ‘I have said my say once and for all,’ was what his manner implied ; ‘and I have no desire to make mischief.’

As to keeping her own secret, Miss Dart had reviewed the matter calmly and dispassionately in her own mind, and found that she had no scruples about it. If the Major had

been of her own age, as he himself had put it, and if their union could have in any way injured the family prospects, her position would have been different ; but there was certainly at present no need to provoke disapproval and endanger friendship. Besides, she had not, as yet, even formally accepted him.

There came a time when, looking back at this period of her life with bitterness in her soul, she seemed to have been dwelling in a Fool's Paradise : to many of us no other Paradise is possible, and while it lasts it serves its purpose as though it were a seventh heaven ; but it was not so much that her happiness was unreal, as that it was another person, a new Elizabeth Dart, that was enjoying it. Had she been her once keen, sagacious, independent self, she would never have known that hour of joy to which, with self-blinded eyes, she surrendered herself. The flame of love within her, though it burned so brightly, was steady and without flicker. It needed not to be fed with letters from the beloved object, nor with iterations of his vows ; and she

credited him with the like confidence in delaying her promised reply to him. It was difficult to explain to herself the cause of her procrastination in this respect. Perhaps she had some misgivings, not of herself nor of him, but as regarded the sacrifice he would be making for her sake. Perhaps she willingly prolonged her days of freedom—the last she could call her own—to be used, as she phrased it, without reference to her other self that was to be. However, at last she wrote.

It was a letter different altogether, both in style and spirit, from most acceptances of a similar kind. Her love for him was frankly acknowledged, and devotedly expressed; but she dwelt much on her own shortcomings and unworthiness. Of her former life she said but little; not because she was ashamed of it, but because she was secretly conscious that its details would not interest him. ‘I have only one relative in the world,’ she wrote: ‘my dear Aunt Jane, whom I do not expect that you will see with the same eyes I do, but whom you must love for my sake, if not for

her own. My conscience reproaches me for concealing from her my present happiness ; but you see, I am already learning to obey you, and have told her nothing. Nothing is suspected here save by Mr. Leyden, who, I am now convinced, will not betray us. If Mrs. Melburn were in England, I should of course owe it to her to tell her all—I could not remain for twenty-four hours under her roof without doing so ; but I feel no such obligation imposed upon me at Casterton, so you may be quite at ease on this point. . . . I quite agreed with what you said the other day about London as a dwelling-place, though I may not have seemed very enthusiastic about it at the time ; the fact is—thanks to you, Sir—my mind was a little off its balance. I seemed to hear nothing you said (after that one thing) ; but now every precious word comes back to me. Yes ; London, by all means, though doubtless I should have been equally conformable to your wishes if you had said Bath, or Jericho. You have not only robbed me of my heart, but of my will.

Hitherto, London has always appeared to me very harsh and egotistic—stony-hearted, as De Quincey calls its Oxford Street ; hitherto, I have been but a pilgrim and a sojourner there ; with you by my side, it will be no longer a peopled solitude, but something very different. . . . As to what you said of the risk of correspondence, I am quite content not to hear from you ; for your silence will give consent to my indulging in a thousand happy thoughts, of which you will be the centre. From the news from Germany to-day, it seems certain that we shall return to Burrow Hall in July, at the farthest. I hear Mrs. Melburn is little, if at all, bettered by the change. When I think of the pain and troubles of others, and contrast them with my present bliss, I am ashamed of my own unworthiness ; such sentiments, however, I know, appear in your *Index Expurgatorius* under the general head of doldrums ; so no more of them. When I am with you, I can make myself very disagreeable, as you know, in the way of lectures and reproofs ; but now

that I am away, I am only bent on pleasing you. Alas, alas, how I love you !’

There was much more to the same effect : the self-abnegation of a sovereign will—the homage of a noble heart to an idol of its own creation—with now and again a struggle where the old individuality and independence of character made a stand for an instant against the tide of passion.

When the letter was posted, Miss Dart experienced a sense of extreme relief. The Psalmist’s *Liberavi animam* has an application far wider than the religious circle. Nervous and excitable persons, over whom some important stroke of Fate is impending, are often driven to their wits’ end by the contemplation of it ; but let them once sit down and write their appeal, defence, or whatever plea in restraint of execution occurs to them, then the weight, though it still overhangs their heads, is removed from their hearts. They have done their best, is their comforting reflection, and they can do no more ; and when the mind is monopolised by joyful anticipation instead of

apprehension, the same effect is produced by a similar course of action.

For the first time since the Major's proposal, Miss Dart now felt herself free to follow the natural bent of her disposition, and to turn her thoughts to Mr. Felix Argand and the 'Millennium.' She had, of course, acknowledged that gentleman's letter, but no other communication had passed between them. She had read with attention the copies of the review with which he had supplied her; but they had given her little assistance in the way of suggestion. Its contents were varied enough, and perhaps too varied. Had their range been more limited, it would have made her choice of a subject easier. She was not one of those literary aspirants to whom everything that is their own appears to have a peculiar charm and the stamp of originality. There was nothing in her collection of MSS. that seemed suitable, or, at all events, as representative of her powers. Disappointed, but not dispirited, it suddenly struck her that a description of Casterton and its surroundings;

which had made so deep an impression on her own mind, might have some interest for those who were strangers to such old-world haunts.

The town with 'Silence and old Time' for its indwellers ; the downs, with their freedom and solitude ; the sea, and the marsh that had once been the sea ; and, above all, Battle Hill, with its legend and its buried mystery : these at least were subjects in themselves not commonplace, and capable of picturesque treatment. She wrote a sketch of them at a sitting, which, however, was prolonged till daybreak, and in hot haste. Ideas suggested themselves to her with such rapidity that she feared her pen would fail to seize them ere they escaped ; a day or two was devoted to correction and excision, when she was amazed to find how little was to be effected in the way of improvement, for she had yet to learn that with genius it is not the second thoughts that are best. Finally, she made a fair copy of the article, and, with many misgivings and an apologetic letter, despatched it. As the contributions to the 'Millennium' were all

signed, it was necessary to follow that practice ; but she entreated the editor's permission, in the unexpected case of his accepting the paper, to permit it to wear a pseudonym. She entitled it ' A Bit of Old England,' and signed it ' John Javelin,' which, while having some vague reference to her own name, would conceal it, as well as her sex, from recognition.

Unlike her communication to Burrow Hall, when once it was dropped into the post she regretted its departure, and was tormented with the conviction of its inadequacy and shortcomings. Even when, like the dove from the Ark, after many days it did not return to her, she drew no favourable augury from that circumstance, but pictured it lying in unequal strips in Mr. Argand's waste-paper basket.

CHAPTER XXV.

SENT FOR.

SAVE for the proof sheets from the 'Parthenon,' which now came pretty frequently to Matthew, with now and then a cheque, which, though of insignificant amount, filled his heart with gladness such as only our first earnings can bestow, the Casterton postman had almost a sinecure as regarded the Look-out. Mrs. Meyrick was only not forgotten by the world, because it had never known her ; beyond the four walls of her little home she had no friend even on paper ; while Miss Dart's sole correspondent was Aunt Jane, who every week indited an epistle from the New Road, full of domestic intelligence respecting Mary Anne, the fourteenth or fifteenth of the lodging-house maidens (as it happened), her breakages, and

her cousin in the Guards, with some notes on natural history, taken from personal observation of Mouser, the black cat. With the like regularity, letters came for Mary Melburn, from her mother; but which by no means indulged in detail. They dwelt much more upon her daughter's doings than her own, and it was rather by reading between the lines of her communication than from anything she said of her own health that Mary gathered there was no improvement in it, but rather the contrary. The Squire, no doubt, had written to his son upon that subject with greater candour; but, even as it was, Mary's heart was full of forebodings. That her present happiness, and her freedom from the hateful attentions of Mr. Winthrop, were purchased by her mother's voluntary exile she had no suspicion—no child can guess the self-sacrifice of which a mother is capable—but the thought of her, ill, solitary, or worse than solitary, and in a foreign land, made the girl's heart ache.

One morning a letter arrived for her from

the Squire himself, the very sight of which chased the colour from her cheeks. Her father scarcely ever wrote to her, and the apprehension that he had written in her mother's stead, because she was too ill to write, at once occurred to her. The communication, however, which was very brief, was to some extent reassuring. Mr. Melburn described his wife's health as neither better nor worse ; but, since it was no better, he had decided to bring her home at once, where they would arrive on the day, or perhaps even the day before, his letter would reach Casterton. In this uncertainty there might be a difficulty in sending the carriage for Mary and Miss Dart, and he therefore directed them to proceed to Burrow Hall forthwith in some hired conveyance. In her delight at the prospect of so soon embracing her mother, the urgency implied in this last sentence at first escaped Mary's notice ; but to Miss Dart the summons appeared very grave. She even reproached herself for being less cast down by it than the occasion seemed to demand ; but the fact is,

that in the marshalling of human affairs, those of other people, unless they are very dear to us, must always stand in the rank behind our own ; and the same word of command which recalled Mary to the couch of her invalid mother summoned Miss Dart to her lover.

But for that reflection, it would have been grief to her, indeed, to bid adieu to Casterton. The place itself had attractions for her—its quiet, old-world isolation, its wind-swept waste of marsh and downland, and the murmur and passion of its sea—such as no other place had ever had. It is only in a few cases that locality, independent of association, takes any hold of the human heart ; as a rule, man is almost as indifferent to nature in its particular aspects as nature is to him ; but now and then it happens—and this is by no means confined to persons of romantic or impressionable dispositions—that the heart is drawn to some scene of beauty as to a home. The rich man says, ‘I will come here again next year,’ or even, if he is very much enraptured, ‘I will live here.’ Miss Dart, who had no such

opportunities of gratifying a caprice, could only wish 'Good-bye' to Casterton. It was possible, and even probable, that she might never see it again, and the thought of that long farewell filled her with something more than regret—with hopeless yearnings. The parting, too, with her hostess and Matthew was full of sadness. Mrs. Meyrick had shown nothing but kindness to her: if the widow had little worldly wisdom, she had none of the follies of the world: no pride, no estimation of persons by their purses; and she was a gentlewoman to the core. It was impossible, thanks to the Squire's frankness of expression, that she could be unconscious of her weaknesses and incompetence, but of her own virtues she remained in utter ignorance.

When Miss Dart, as she took leave of her, exclaimed, not without tears, 'Dear Mrs. Meyrick, how good you have been to me!' the widow was honestly amazed.

'I good to you, Lizzie! Why, you have been a sunbeam in our house; and how can I

ever be grateful enough to you for the interest you have taken in my poor boy ? ’

Matthew, indeed, felt her departure only less than the loss of Mary.

‘ I am indebted to you, dear Miss Dart,’ he said, ‘ if not for a new existence, for infusing vitality into the old one. Thanks to you, I am another creature, though still but a poor one. Your encouragement has put hope into me : thanks to your good offices, I have found touch of my fellows. I shall never forget you—never,’ and then the poor lad had turned his face to the wall, ashamed of the weakness that he could not hide.

Roger Leyden, too, in spite of his plain speaking, had a high place in her regard. Even as a man of character, with a distinct individuality of his own, he was very interesting to her ; but his devotion to her friends, and his tender consideration for herself, shown in a hundred ways (but in none more than his silence upon a matter the revelation of which would have sadly marred her farewells, and

even, perhaps, turned their regret to bitterness), had endeared him to her.

‘We shall meet again, my dear young lady,’ he said, with cheerful confidence, ‘though under very different conditions. You are going away in the Casterton fly, but you will return, like Lord Bateman’s inamorata, in a coach and three. The stars have said it.’

His presence among the little circle at the moment of leave-taking was a great relief to all concerned.

How sad it seems that there should be such partings, that such shadows should fall upon homes that at the best have so little sunshine!—that the bridegroom should be taken from the arms of his bride, and the boy from the embraces of his mother to tempt the perilous seas, when so little, and that which even man could supply, is wanting to prevent the catastrophe! It is easy to say, ‘If these unfortunates could only see through their tears but a little way into the future, how much better for them, they would often admit, it is that things are thus arranged’:

but, alas ! no such prevision is vouchsafed to them. And, in the meantime, what solitary homes, what vacant chairs, what echoes of imagined footfalls on the one side ; what lookings back and picturings of the far away, and yearnings that try the very heartstrings, on the other ! Regard them how we may, such departures are as Death itself, without that balm of resignation which the sense of the inevitable commonly bestows. In such cases, it is those who remain who are most to be pitied, for everything reminds them of what they have lost ; while those who go forth have their minds distracted from regret by action amid new scenes and duties.

When the door of the Look-out closed on its late visitors, there was darkness indeed on the faces they had left behind them.

For awhile, too, the shadow of the parting hour saddened the two girls as they sat in silence side by side in the jolting fly, and slowly passed by the old familiar places. It was possible they would never see them again, and only too probable that, if one revisited

them, it would be without the other ; but when the causeway was passed, and the hill climbed, and the breeze of the downs began to blow about them, their spirits began to rise. There was scarce a cloud in the summer sky. The larks twittered and towered and sang about their heads. The air was sweet with herb and flower.

‘I cannot but think that such weather as this must do dear mamma good ?’ said Mary, cheerfully, but half interrogatively, as such remarks are made when we need corroboration of our hope.

‘Yes, indeed ; though I believe less in native air than in the influence and associations of home. You will say, perhaps, since I have no personal experience of them, that that is a subject on which I can be no judge, but my reading points that way.’

‘You are thinking of Scott,’ said Mary, softly, with the tears in her eyes. They had been reading Lockhart’s ‘Life’ together lately, and Mary, who had been introduced to it for the first time, had been deeply

touched by that sad passage when Sir Walter, returning—a dying man—from abroad, is roused from his stupor by the voice of the Tweed.

It was an unfortunate chord to have touched, as Miss Dart felt.

‘I was not thinking of Scott in particular, dear Mary,’ she said, gently, ‘but of the thousands of invalids who are recommended to try foreign scenes by their medical advisers. Scientifically, they may be correct; but they do not sufficiently take into account the depressing effect upon the patient caused by the severance of home ties, which often far outweighs any benefit conferred by change of climate. There is nothing that so retards recovery as low spirits: it is only too much to be feared that your mother has suffered from them while she has been away from you; and the sight of the roses on your pretty cheeks will do her more good, I honestly believe, than all the Brunnen of Germany.’

Mary answered only by a sigh; the silence between the two girls remained unbroken.

for many a mile. They were both busied with their own thoughts ; which, though there was no lack of sympathy between them, were of a widely different kind : the one was dwelling on the last days of Love when it moves hand-in-hand with Death ; the other on its early prime. Mary lay back in the vehicle with closed eyes, and tears beneath their lids. Miss Dart, though grave enough, took note through the open windows of every feature of the landscape—the shadows on the hills, the smoke wreaths from the valley farms, even the contrast of colours of the turf on which they drove with that of the untrodden down : every object of nature had a novel charm and significance for her.

‘ Do you think that man—Mr. Winthrop—will be there, Lizzie ? ’ inquired Mary, presently. She spoke in a low, quiet tone, such as one uses who has been thinking on a subject long before he speaks ; but the question startled her companion exceedingly.

‘ No,’ she replied, hastily ; ‘ he will not be there.’ Then, as if conscious she had been too

confident, she added, 'It is, at least, very unlikely.'

'My mother being so ill, you mean?'

Miss Dart did mean that; but she had had also in her mind the half-promise that the Major had given her that Mary's persecution should be dropped.

'I think on Mrs. Melburn's first coming home, and as an invalid,' she exclaimed, 'that no guest is likely to be invited to the house; and especially one that is known to be unwelcome to her.'

'He is, however, Jefferson's friend,' observed Mary.

'I think you wrong your brother in supposing him capable of inviting Mr. Winthrop under such circumstances.'

In her heart she felt certain, for other reasons, that he would not be there; and she was secretly well pleased to be able to defend the Major with confidence against the imputation of selfishness.

Mary seemed about to speak, but restrained herself; she only shook her head, with a

melancholy incredulous smile, and again relapsed into silence.

Presently they came to the crest of the hill, from which the house was visible.

Mary leant forward, and gazed at it intently ; the hand she laid on the window-frame was trembling ; her lips murmured ‘ Thank Heaven ! ’

Miss Dart understood at once that the poor girl had feared to see the blinds down.

‘ You must keep up a good heart, Mary,’ she said, reprovingly ; ‘ and especially in your mother’s presence. I beseech you, for her sake, to be as brave as you can.’

Mary made a gesture of assent, and pressed her companion’s hand. She well understood that the comparative coldness of the other’s tone arose from no want of sympathy : there are occasions when firmness, even to severity, is a greater kindness than the softest word.

The lodge gate was fastened back, which was not usual, and when the vehicle drew up at the portico the front door was opened on the instant, both, as Miss Dart’s quick intelli-

gence suggested to her, inauspicious signs. To his young mistress's eager inquiry the butler answered that Mrs. Melburn was as well as could be expected after her long journey of yesterday—a reply, evidently learnt by heart, that confirmed the governess's suspicions. Mary instantly hurried upstairs, leaving Miss Dart alone in the hall.

There was nothing for her to do, not even to 'unpack' ; for the luggage of the two young ladies was to follow them from Casterton in a cart. As she stood irresolute, hoping that Mr. Melburn might appear and give her some certain information of his wife's condition before her own interview with her should take place, the door of the breakfast-room was pushed noiselessly open, and a voice she knew, though it had never shaped that word before, murmured 'Lizzie.'

CHAPTER XXVI.

OUTSIDE THE WINDOW.

IT was the same room in which she had had that first interview with him on her arrival at Burrow Hill, when his naturalness and good-humour had put her at her ease and convinced her that there was one person, at least, in that strange house with whom she would be able to 'get on.' But his reception of her on this occasion was very different. 'Oh, happy hour !' he whispered beneath his breath, and drew her to his breast, and kissed her again and again.

'You got my letter, then,' she said, softly, as though excusing herself for submitting to these caresses, which the consciousness that she had acknowledged her love for him made, in truth, a thousand times more intoxicating.

‘Of course I did, my darling, and shall wear it next my heart till you take its place,’ was the ardent rejoinder. ‘Think what it has cost me not to reply to it ; and think,’ he added, with a glance at the unclosed door behind which they stood, ‘what a need for caution there must be which imposed upon me such a cruel silence.’

‘But there is no need now,’ said the girl, withdrawing from him with a sudden impulse.

‘Indeed there is, darling, and more than ever. You will surely put a little trust in me !’ he pleaded ; for her face had suddenly grown very grave. ‘You will not misconstrue or misconceive my motives, as others have done, when I say that for some time yet we must needs keep our love a secret.’

‘I cannot do it—not even for your sake,’ she answered, firmly.

‘But you have done it already, dearest.’

‘With Mary it was different. I owe her no such duty as I owe Mrs. Melburn ; but under *her* roof there must be nothing clandestine.

If I deceived her, I should be unworthy of you.'

'You do not know how ill she is, Lizzie.'

'That would only make it worse—to deceive a sick, perhaps a dying, woman ! How can you ask it of me ?'

'Because I love you so ; because the thought of any hindrance to our union drives me wild. Hindrance !—nay, there would be flattest denial. You do not know my step-mother's obstinate nature, nor my father's pride.'

'I am proud, too, in my way,' returned Miss Dart. Her shapely figure was drawn up to its full height ; her eyes sparkled with a light that was new to him. She was resolute, it was plain, to have her will ; and yet, as he gazed upon her, and bit his lip in doubt and fear, he could not withhold his admiration. It seemed to him that her beauty had never shone so gloriously before.

'There is only one way,' he murmured mechanically. 'Give me till to-morrow.

Promise me at least this much—that for twenty-four hours you will not disclose the—the relations between us.’

‘I do not like it,’ said Miss Dart, doubtfully, and yet remorseful of her doubt. It was terrible to her to have to oppose him ; almost as terrible as that sharp, quick pang at her heart—caused by she scarce knew what—which had made her step back from him a few minutes ago.

‘Do you suppose *I* like it ?’ he exclaimed, bitterly. ‘Do you think it will be easy or pleasant for me, for even twenty-four hours, to keep at a distance from you ; to treat you as if nothing had passed between us ; to put a padlock on my lips ; to veil my eyes ; to hide the thoughts—the loving, blissful thoughts—that consume my soul ? Oh, Lizzie !—to refuse my first request, and that so slight a one !’

His words, uttered with passionate vehemence, but in suppressed, scarcely audible tones, melted her heart within her ; but what moved her even more were his pleading eyes, his

beseeching looks; his strong arms held forth in piteous expostulation.

‘I do not refuse it,’ she answered, with her hand upon her heart, as though to restrain its wild and unaccustomed beating. ‘I will keep our secret till to-morrow.’

‘For that, much thanks. It is the last time that I shall ask you to give way to any wish of mine; henceforth, it is your will in all things that shall be my law—the law of love.’ Again he took her to his arms and kissed her tenderly—then suddenly started back, with an exclamation.

‘What is it?’ she inquired, her manner almost composed by contrast with his agitation and alarm.

‘Nothing. I thought I saw a man’s shadow through the window; my father is somewhere in the grounds, and if he should have seen us——’

‘Well, and what then?’ she put in, disdainfully. ‘He will know to-day what he will have to be told to-morrow, that is all. What have we to be ashamed of?’

‘Nothing, indeed,’ he answered, eagerly ; ‘but you do not know my father. What would happen—should he discover our secret—would be, that you would be packed home at once—and I, well, packed *off*. What then? again you may say.’ He broke off abruptly, and fell to pacing the little room. ‘Well, by Heaven, I believe you are right. A woman’s instinct is sometimes better than all the wisdom of the serpent. On the whole, I believe it would be the best thing that could happen. You would go to your aunt’s house, of course ; and I would take lodgings in the same parish for three weeks—that is necessary, I believe, to secure a licence. Or, still better, we could go to a registry office : you are not one to care about orange-flowers, and bridesmaids, and all the paraphernalia of the altar. Why should I not call you mine at once?’

‘That was not my proposition,’ said Miss Dart. ‘I wish you to do nothing rash or without consideration.’

‘I am sure you don’t—the proposal comes from me. I am not a young gentleman under

age, or just of age. I am my own master—that is, until I knew you. Now, I am your slave.’

It was pleasant to her to hear him call himself so—this strong-willed and impetuous man, of whom so many stood in fear—even if she did not quite believe it ; as to his offer, she did not take the same view of it as other girls, no better, if better placed, might have done ; the standpoint from which she viewed it was so different ; she had pride enough, but her pride inclined her to it. She resented the contempt which, as he had implied—and, no doubt, with good reason—the Squire would regard her. She knew herself superior to the whole race of Melburns (save one) from the Conquest downwards. Birth and blood were nothing to her, wealth she did not desire ; if the Major had represented himself to her as a man of fortune, instead of one with moderate means, it would not have affected her a hair’s breadth in his favour ; it would, indeed, have been to his disadvantage, since, in taking him, she might have been taking

something away from others. It seemed to her that she had no less right to make her choice of him than he of her. That she could make him a good wife, she felt assured ; she was ready to sacrifice herself to him in all ways, and, at the same time, to benefit those belonging to him. Whatever influence she might have on him would be used to mend the breach between him and his family, and to disabuse their minds from the prejudices they entertained against him. She would, above all, be in a position to oppose the designs of Mr. Winthrop should he still attempt to prosecute them. All these considerations pressed upon her mind. What she was not so conscious of was that his passion was re-echoed and responded to in her own heart by an equal yearning. If love consumed him as he had said, it also burnt in her, though with a far purer and steadier flame. She had spoken to him with apparent calmness and deliberation, but it had cost her much to do so ; she had longed to say, even to that proposition of secrecy, and, as it had seemed to her, almost

of duplicity, 'Whatever you please, dearest ; to be assured of your love is all I ask ;' and now, when what he proposed involved no dereliction of duty, why should she hesitate to make him happy? His scheme, perhaps, was somewhat audacious ; but it was not like an elopement proposed by a young heir, but only a taking of the bull by the horns—a bold method of doing away at a stroke with the obstructions that stupidity and convention were certain to offer to their union. In delay there was certainly danger, and to both of them : why should she run the risk of their happiness being sacrificed at the altar of family pride?

'If I am thrust out of these doors through no fault of mine,' she answered, after a long silence, 'I am ready to do as you think best and wisest.'

'If you are thrust out of these doors, my darling,' repeated the Major, with tender earnestness, 'my arms will be open to you. In the meantime, while you remain here be surprised at nothing that happens.'

He pressed his lips to her forehead, as if in sign and seal of their agreement, and noiselessly left the room.

She stood awhile half dazed, but wholly happy, till the unaccustomed hush and silence in the house reminded her that all is not love in the world : while she had been partaking of its raptures, what a scene of misery was in all probability being enacted above-stairs ! Could the love be worthy, she asked herself in bitter self-reproach, that had made her, even for a few minutes, oblivious of the fact ? —and yet—and yet—was she to blame that human nature had been too strong for her ? White, and silent as a ghost, she hurried through the empty hall and up the stairs to her own room, whither, as she guessed, Mary would presently come to fetch her ; but instead of taking off her bonnet and cloak, she sank down on a chair, overcome by a tumult of emotions. Through the open windows, which looked out immediately on a small shrubbery leading to a paddock, where the cattle were standing under the trees, came all those

tranquil sounds which seem to intensify the noon-day silence of the summer. The dreamy caw of the rooks, the cock-crow from some distant farmyard, the swishing of the cows' tails, the swing of the bough released from the weight of the blackbird—it seemed as though, like Fine-Ear in the fairy story, she could almost hear the grass grow. Had she done wrong, or had she done right? Had she been thinking of herself and her own advantage all along, while flattering herself that she was doing her best for others? From all self-seeking in the way of profit or position she could honestly exonerate herself, and leave the court of conscience without a stain; but, in giving way to her lover's persuasions, had she not been conscious of finding for herself an escape from slavery, a termination to a life of ungenial toil? What would honest and simple-hearted Aunt Jane say when she came to hear of her engagement; or, rather, what would she probably think of it while locking her thoughts in her own heart lest they should do her darling wrong? And if

even Aunt Jane should thus arraign her, could Mrs. Melburn, and those who thought with her on such subjects, be blamed for imputing selfish and unworthy motives ?

Here the fragrance of a cigar was borne on the summer breeze, and a footstep that she knew passed close beneath the open window ; then an angry voice cried, ‘ Jefferson, a word with you ’ ; and the footsteps halted ; others came up to where they stopped, and she felt that the Squire and his son were standing within a few yards of where she sat, and were about to speak of her. Whether it was her duty to rise and let them know that she was within earshot, it is difficult to say ; but Nature had decided for her. Her limbs were paralysed—not, indeed, with fear, but with a certain dread expectancy : her tongue clove to the roof of her mouth. She could only picture to herself the two men standing face to face—Mr. Melburn pale with rage, and the Major with that quiet imperturbable look which he always wore in times of variance with his people.

‘I will thank you to pursue none of your disgraceful intrigues, sir, under my roof,’ were the Squire’s first words. Terrible words indeed ; but, even while they rang in her burning ears, Miss Dart did not forget the nature of the speaker, or the circumstance that drew them from his lips. The Squire was just the man who, in his moments of fury, exaggerates the crime of an offender and generalises an accusation for the very purpose of embittering it.

‘Indeed, sir, you are doing me wrong,’ was the quiet reply. She could see him, though the wall was between them, flicking away the ash from his cigar, and smiling confidently under his moustache.

‘I know the morality of your profession as to falsehood, where a woman is concerned,’ answered the Squire, contemptuously ; ‘or else I should say you were lying.’

‘I hope you will not say that, sir,’ replied the Major, not pleadingly, but in a tone of suppressed menace.

‘Let me say at once, then, that I

happened to be passing by the study window ten minutes ago, and thereby save you the trouble of further subterfuge. Perhaps you will explain, with as little circumlocution as the case admits, how you came to be kissing my daughter's companion ?'

'Nothing is simpler, sir ; indeed, if this inquisition had not taken place, it was my intention this very day to have told you—not, indeed, that I had kissed Miss Dart, which is, after all, a superfluous detail ; but that I had found it necessary for both our sakes to secure her as an ally in a certain affair which is at least as important as a flirtation with a governess.'

'You admit the flirtation, however,' remarked the Squire, drily.

'Well, yes ; the only means that occurred to me for securing her services,' replied the Major, coolly, 'was to pretend to make love to her.'

Miss Dart shuddered as she listened : the lie, she felt assured, was uttered for her sake ; but it was no less a lie. She had read that,

in men's eyes, or in some men's eyes, all was fair in love and war ; but hitherto with contempt and disapproval. Was it possible that true love could ever be the excuse for an untruth? The very calmness with which the lie was told appalled her. Could love, and not custom, have given that impressive tone, that confidence of utterance, which almost to her ears carried conviction with it?

‘It has, perhaps, escaped your notice,’ continued the Major—with one pause, owed to a puff of his cigar—‘that Miss Dart, giving way, no doubt, to certain influences which have been brought to bear upon her, has all along opposed herself to your wishes in the matter of Mr. Winthrop ; a piece of impertinence, you would say’—this, no doubt, in answer to some contemptuous gesture of the Squire’s—‘but we must take things as we find them : her opinion has great weight with Mary, and it seemed to me worth a little trouble to win her over to our views.’

‘Why not have told me all this at once,

and let me have sent her packing?' returned the Squire, quickly.

'You know my position here, sir, and how any direct interference of mine, even for Mary's good, would have been resented by Mrs. Melburn and misrepresented to yourself. I have, as it happens, fallen under your displeasure even as matters stand: that is my misfortune; I have done my best, and failed, it seems, most egregiously. As to Miss Dart, you shall never have to complain of my speaking one word to her again; but on the other hand, while she remains under this roof, you may take it for granted that Winthrop's attentions will be persistently discouraged.'

'I shall give Miss Dart her *congé* this very day,' said the Squire, with sudden decision.

'In my opinion, you could not do a wiser thing, sir,' said the Major, indifferently.

Miss Dart heard this without surprise; now that she had once got over the shock of the Major's duplicity, the rest seemed strangely familiar to her—like one of those scenes

which we fancy have occurred to us in a previous state of existence. She understood, as if she had been at the back of his mind, that his object was to get her out of the house that he might follow her to London at once and marry her.

There was the quick spurt of a match and silence while another cigar was being lit. Then a pause which had no such explanation. The Squire was regarding his son with eyes once more full of suspicion ; the indifference he had shown as to the governess's departure had perhaps been overdone.

‘When does your leave expire, sir?’ he presently asked, abruptly.

‘It has only just begun,’ returned the Major, smiling. ‘At the risk of being wearisome to my family, I thought of living at home for the next six weeks.’

The Squire stroked his chin and nodded his head, as if in sign that, having considered the matter, he felt, upon the whole, satisfied. He turned upon his heel as if to retrace his steps, then suddenly stopped, and in grave,

quick tones, such as one uses to escape from an unpleasant subject, observed, 'I conclude, Jefferson, that your wife is still alive?'

'Yes, sir ; she is.'

Footsteps upon the gravel dying away in opposite directions : on the one side sharp and decided ; on the other, over which hung the tobacco-smoke, slow and dawdling—the steps of a careless loungee. Then the caw of the rook, and the crow of the cock, and the swishing of the cows' tails in the shade again. All was the same as it had been ten minutes ago ; but, in the meantime, a life had been shattered. There are wounds which the misconduct of those we love is capable of inflicting on our spiritual nature similar in their effects to those of gunshot wounds on the human frame : death ensues, but without mutilation ; and there are also catastrophes equivalent to those produced by the bursting of a shell, by which the whole moral being is laid in ruins. Of these latter victims, one here and there, if he have strength to bear the knife—the lopping away of the last fragments of misplaced

trust, the splinters of diseased and morbid love—will sometimes recover ; but he is never, as the phrase goes, ‘ the same man he was ’ again. And this thing is still more true in the case of a woman.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A TURN OF THE TIDE.

As the prophet, during the overturning of a pitcher, seemed to himself to have experienced the joys of seven heavens, so he might doubtless have felt during the same time (had his imagination tended the other way) the pangs of as many hells ; similarly, it was not a minute since the hearing of that dreadful question, ‘ I conclude that your wife is still alive ? ’ and its still more dreadful answer, ‘ Yes, sir, she is,’ that Elizabeth Dart remained motionless in her chair ; but within that minute were crowded such agonies of emotion as would have sufficed an ordinary soul for its earthly lifetime. Presently she rose, and, taking up mechanically her little hand-bag, stole, with tottering steps, down the back staircase ; then

passing through the servants' offices (where a cook-maid saw her, and afterwards observed that Miss Dart 'looked as though she were a-walking in her sleep'), she reached the carriage drive, and passed unobserved through the lodge gates.

She was bound for Casterton, the only place in the world, save London, where she could find a friend ; she would have gone to town from the railway station at once, but that she had no money—not even so much as was necessary to pay her fare. We often glibly say that the rich have their troubles like the poor ; but we forget to add that the same troubles are increased tenfold in the case of the latter through the absence of the mere means of remedy or escape : their child may be ill in both cases, but in the one case the doctor cannot be sent for, or the remedies he prescribes cannot be procured ; or the home may become hateful and the scene of insult, where the poor inmate has not the wherewithal which the rich one possesses to seek another or even to leave it.

The road between Elizabeth Dart and her destination was long and hilly ; but, under ordinary circumstances, it would not have tried her strength and youth very severely. But a laden heart is a heavy burthen ; and even the physical difficulties that lay before her added insensibly to its weight. It would be evening, she dimly reflected, before the summit of Battle Hill would loom in sight, even supposing that she had the skill to keep the almost trackless way. How wearisome looked the steep and blinding chalk road ; how desolate the treeless downs, which an hour before had reflected the brightness of her hopes !

In motion, however, especially of a fatiguing kind, our bitterest griefs, though they may not, indeed, be assuaged, for the time are stanch'd, which is why some men speak of 'walking off their cares,' as though it were the gout. And it was only when, at the summit of the first hill, Miss Dart sat down by the wayside for breath, that the full consciousness of her misery began to dawn on her.

Curiously enough, it was not the sense of her misfortune but that of her wrongs which took the foremost place ; exasperation at the injustice with which she had been treated swelled her proud heart well-nigh to bursting, and scorched the tears that would otherwise have flowed for her woes. To put as much space as possible between herself and the roof that sheltered that perfidious slaving snake, Jefferson Melburn, had been her first blind impulse ; but on reflection, if the torrent of angry thoughts that swept across her mind could be so termed, the contempt and callousness of the Squire scarcely less aroused her resentment. The passionate indignation of the deceived woman included father and son in the same condemnation ; it was not ‘ that man ’ only, to think of whom raised the fever of her blood to boiling heat, but ‘ those men.’ The Squire, it is true, did not know what had passed between herself and the Major ; but he knew that, notwithstanding he was vowed to another, his son had made love to her ; and yet he had only objected to it as a domestic

scandal which might disadvantageously affect himself—nay, when persuaded that the object of this atrocious duplicity had been to further his own ends, he had actually acquiesced in it as ‘only a flirtation with a governess !’ Great Heavens ! what was this race of profligates and schemers that, to further one nefarious plan, the happiness and reputation of a friendless girl should not weigh with them a feather weight ? ‘And my blood, too, is not ditch water,’ was the reflection she would have borrowed from another’s lips had she been in the humour for quotation.

However we gloze and hide the matter, our respect for those whom we conventionally term our ‘betters’ is but the thinnest crust, which one stamp from the foot of insolent injustice destroys for ever ; and, in the case of a naturally independent spirit, sets free a lava-stream of fiery hate, the existence of which, but for that unlucky rent, would never have been suspected, the contemptuous indifference which such a nature opposes to mere annoyance easily passing for submission,

or even acquiescence. It is of this sort, and by this means, that in unquiet times revolutionists are manufactured. Elizabeth Dart had nothing in her composition of the petroleuse, nor could she under any circumstances have become vindictive ; but her whole soul rose in arms against the social system which she held responsible for her wrongs. Nay, to borrow an historic phrase, which well describes the sudden and yet permanent change which had taken place in her character, ‘ it was not a rising, it was a revolution.’

In the tumult of her mind, and the wide sweep of its indignation, Mrs. Melburn herself did not escape reproach. If that lady suspected, as it was almost certain she did, that her step-son was paying his attentions to a girl beneath her roof, to whom by every law of hospitality she stood in the place of a parent, was it not her plain duty to have warned her that they must of necessity be of a dishonourable nature ? It was true that she had evinced displeasure at what had seemed to be the signs of familiarity, or of a mutual understanding be-

tween the Major and her governess. But that was explicable enough : on selfish grounds she had objected to any alliance with her enemy. But cognisant, as she must needs be, of his being a married man, it was shameful of her not to have spoken out, and, with however rough a hand, dragged her from the precipice on which she stood. If the Squire had been callous and brutal, his wife's conduct, being a woman, was worse, and could only have been accounted for on worse grounds—namely, that having failed to secure her as a partisan, she was not displeased to see her bringing on herself a punishment the extremity of which was practically without limit. To do Elizabeth Dart justice, however, this odious accusation had flashed with lurid light but for a moment across her mind, which shrank with horror from the very picture of its own devising. She felt that she had done the dying woman a wrong as grievous, though only in her thoughts, as had been inflicted on herself in practice ; that either the Major's marriage must have been a secret to all but

his father, or that the serious character of his attentions to herself must have escaped Mrs. Melburn's notice. As for Mary, there was still room in her bruised and embittered heart for pity for her as she thought of the pain which her sudden and unexplained departure must needs inflict upon that gentle nature. To what would she attribute this abrupt desertion of her in that day of distress, and perhaps of need ? What would she do when she found that she had fled ?

There was a sound of wheels upon the hill behind her. Was it possible that, having discovered her flight, and the direction it had taken, she was coming after her to induce her to return ? Or could it be that man himself, unconscious of the revelation of his baseness ! Her heart stood still within her at the thought. How hateful had that smiling face, those gracious and confiding tones, the very form whose strength and symmetry had once charmed her eyes, become ! She pictured him now saying always, with sullen, indifferent face, ' Yes, sir ; my wife is still alive.'

As the vehicle came in sight, she recognised, with great relief, the fly in which she had come from Casterton, and which, after the horses had rested and been refreshed at the inn, was doubtless returning thither. In this little matter, at least, Fortune, which owed her so much of reparation, had favoured her.

The driver's momentary astonishment at her request to be taken back to the Look-out was quenched at once in the satisfaction of pocketing a return fare, and she took her seat unquestioned. A mile farther on they met the cart containing the luggage of herself and Mary ; and while what belonged to her was being transferred from it to her own vehicle, she took the opportunity of writing a few pencilled lines—in French, to escape Downshire eyes—to Mary :—

‘ In consequence of a conversation, to which I was an unwilling listener, between your father and Major Melburn this afternoon, there is no course open to me but to leave Burrow Hall. Forgive the uneasiness that

my departure must needs have caused you, and the inconvenience which I fear will ensue from it ; and, under all circumstances, be assured of my affection. I will write to you from London.'

This explanation, bald and curt as it looked, she felt would be sufficient, and, at the same time, inflict no unnecessary pain. It would be taken for granted by the two ladies that the Squire's resolution to give her '*her congé* that very day'—to the utterance of which he would be obliged to confess—had been anticipated by her own act ; while the Major himself would be at no loss to understand the true reason of her departure—namely, the revelation of his treachery and falsehood from his own lips.

What his plan had been—if his recklessness and passion had admitted of a plan—it was difficult to say. The subject was one which his proposed victim naturally shrank from speculating upon ; but he had probably intended to follow her to London, where, having ingratiated himself—an easy task—

more and more into her confidence and affections, he would presently have imposed upon her by a mock marriage.

Humiliating as were the moral aspects of the case, they were hardly less so than those of her financial condition. The very money that was owing to her for her salary, and on which alone she could look for subsistence for the present, seemed to her less like honest earnings than the wages of shame. The idea of accepting a similar post to that which she had filled at Burrow Hall had become abhorrent to her ; to live on the scanty means of Aunt Jane, even for a day, was not to be thought of : and nothing, therefore, remained to her but to seek for a situation in some seminary, such as she had filled before, and had left with such a sense of enfranchisement. How she had beaten her wings against the bars, and pined for open air ; and now, having tasted of it—only at Casterton, however ; for that which she had breathed under the same roof with Jefferson Melburn seemed now mere choke-damp and miasma—she must needs go

back to prison, perhaps for the remainder of her days! And she was not yet five-and-twenty!

Her aspirations, too, which had hitherto supported her in all her troubles—nay, the inspiration, as it had almost seemed, which now and again had taken possession of her soul—had vanished. It could not be said that Mr. Argand's letter had flattered it into existence, for it had dwelt within her, in some dim shape, as long as she could remember; but his encouragement had given it form and lent it wings. Though the paper she had written for the 'Millennium' had fallen far short of what she had expected of herself—for who of us who think at all are satisfied with the expression of our thoughts—she had secretly believed it to possess merit far above the common. The flattering unction which the neophyte in literature can in most cases apply to the wound of disappointment as regards 'style' or 'appropriateness to our columns' was denied to her. It was not her first nor her twentieth production: the com-

position had been as good as she could make it, while, though it was true she had read no such similar mingling of description and reflection in the pages of the 'Millennium,' the very specialty of the review was its originality and freedom from convention. The failure of her contribution must therefore have arisen from want of merit. What to any one experienced in such matters was significant of her utter depression was that she did not for a moment question Mr. Argand's judgment in the matter, far less did she dream of imputing a want of kindness to his silence. He evidently thought that his first impression of her powers had been a false one, and that to give her any further encouragement would be an act of cruelty. Mrs. Meyrick would give her lodgment for the night, no doubt, and her fixed intention upon finding herself in her own room was to destroy every manuscript she possessed, and put an end once for all to her false hopes in that direction, as her false hopes in another had been done to death by a more cruel but not more relentless hand. For the

rest of her natural life she must make up her mind to be a drudge : a fate accepted with resignation by tens of thousands—but who, for the most part, are born for the cart shafts and have no yearning for cleaving the empyrean with sunlit wings.

The shades of evening began to fall when Miss Dart once more found herself looking down on the little town : it seemed more grey and gloomy than she had ever seen it, but upon the summit of Battle Hill still lingered, golden, the last rays of day.

When the door of the Look-out was opened to her, she saw Mrs. Meyrick standing with anxious face behind the little maid : the unaccustomed sound of wheels stopping at her door had doubtless alarmed her.

She took the new-comer's hand in silence, and led her into a little room at the back of the house, now unused except at preserving seasons, but in which her husband had once kept a lathe, and used as a workshop. 'What, in Heaven's name, has happened?' she inquired, in a trembling voice.

‘Nothing—at least nothing to any one of consequence,’ was the bitter rejoinder. Its sarcasm was lost upon the widow, whose mind was not one of those exceptional ones which are fitted up for the reception of two ideas at the same time.

‘My sister-in-law is no worse, then?’ she replied, with relief in her tones.

‘I believe not ; but I have not seen her. I was obliged to come away at once.’

‘But why?—oh, why?’

‘To prevent being sent away ; just as any other servant anticipates dismissal by giving warning.’

‘Sent away ? I am quite sure you ought never to have been sent away,’ exclaimed the kind old lady, indignantly. ‘There must have been some plot against you, and Jefferson was at the bottom of it.’

At that name Miss Dart, hitherto as firm and cold as iron, began to tremble. ‘Sit you down, girl,’ continued the widow, authoritatively, ‘and drink this.’

She had opened a cupboard, and taking out

a square bottle, the contents of which were solid as well as liquid, had rapidly filled from it a small glass. 'The cherries have no stones in them, and will not hurt you even if you do swallow them; the brandy is thirty years old.'

It is doubtful whether this eulogy would have had much effect but for the appealing look with which it was accompanied. To please her hostess Miss Dart took a sip from the glass, and at once experienced a sense of restoration. She had passed the whole day without food, for she had had no appetite for breakfast, and the emotions she had undergone had exhausted her.

'Thank you,' she murmured, gratefully. 'I feel better now. You have just mentioned a certain person's name. Be so good as to tell me——'

'Not one word will I speak about him, or anybody else, till you have finished the glass.'

There are some things, such as the administration of cordials, in which the weak become the stronger. Miss Dart obeyed.

‘Now eat a biscuit.’

This mandate was more difficult of accomplishment. Who of us is so fortunate as not to have known moments when the staff of life is literally broken, and the gorge rises at a crumb of bread ?

‘If you wish to ask me any questions about Major Melburn, I am ready to answer them,’ resumed Mrs. Meyrick, with an air of resignation. ‘It is an unpleasant subject to me, as you may have guessed ; but if it is absolutely necessary——’

‘I wish to ask only one thing,’ interrupted Miss Dart. ‘Did you know that he was married ?’

‘Certainly not.’

‘You would have known it, I suppose, if Mrs. Melburn knew it ?’

‘Without doubt I should have known it. My sister-in-law and I have no secrets from each other as respects that person.’

‘Yet it does not seem to surprise you to hear what I have just said.’

‘Not at all. Nothing that I could hear

said of my brother's son would surprise me—my poor dear girl.'

Her first words were wrung from an indignant woman denouncing, unwillingly, her own flesh and blood ; her last, were the expression of tenderest sympathy with the misfortune of one she loved. Miss Dart had suddenly burst into tears, and covered her face with her hands. Mrs. Meyrick made no effort to restrain her companion's grief. Like a doctor, slow to diagnose the disease of his patient, but who, having once discovered it, is at no loss how to treat it, she remained quiet and collected, save that her own eyes were wet with tears.

'I had no idea how things were with you, my darling,' she said, presently, 'or I would have spoken long ago. You are, doubtless, asking yourself, "Why did not Mrs. Melburn, who was in a better position than I for seeing how matters were going on, utter no note of warning?" To explain that, I must tell you what is known to none but herself and me—not even to her own daughter. Yes,' she

continued, as if to herself, 'I owe it to Edith as well as to you, though the confidence is a painful one. Long years ago, when you were a little child, and it could never have been guessed how such a matter could have affected you, my sister-in-law, then a young and very pretty girl, met Jefferson Melburn at a ball. It was in some garrison town where his regiment was quartered, and their acquaintanceship was of the slightest: nevertheless, I believe, he proposed to her and was rejected. The affair—or at least that was how it was represented to me—was of so transient a nature that it made hardly any impression on her. When Mr. Melburn, the elder, offered himself, the recollection of what had happened gave her some embarrassment; but Jefferson was at that time in India, and not expected home for years; he had had, moreover, a quarrel with the Squire, and it was generally understood that he would never come to Burrow Hall; and, as you know, she became Mrs. Melburn. Then, matters turned out quite differently—and, as generally happens,

much worse. Jefferson came to England on sick-leave ; his quarrel with his father was made up—though they will never be friends—by some arrangement about the entail on the estate ; and Jefferson came home. My sister-in-law had never liked him, and his former liking for her had now changed to detestation. Outwardly, he maintained a cold and deferential respect for her, but he has never lost an opportunity of doing her a mischief, or of fomenting the unhappy differences that arose between her husband and herself. Revengeful and utterly unscrupulous as she knew him to be, figure to yourself what life must have been to her for the last twenty years, at the mercy of this man's slanderous tongue ! When I hear people talk so glibly of the wrath to come, as of something new and strange, can they know, I wonder, that in this world already there are poor souls, not altogether wicked ones, who have found their Gehenna !' She paused a moment, overcome with emotion, and transfigured in her companion's eyes from the commonplace, kind creature

she had hitherto known to something almost heroic in her divine compassion. 'Judge, then, dear Lizzie, was it possible for this unhappy woman even if she knew what—as I guess—was taking place between you and this man, that she could have spoken out against him? On the other hand, had she known that he was married, I do believe that no personal considerations, however weighty——'

'Enough, enough,' exclaimed Miss Dart, falling on the widow's neck, and mingling her tears with hers; 'forgive me, that, in my selfish folly, supposing myself to be the most miserable woman in the world, instead of being merely the most blind and foolish, I have caused you so much distress and pain. Your confidence, be assured, is not misplaced; and, as for mine, whatever is worth your hearing of my wretched story shall be told at once.' Then, in few words, she told her all that had happened, concealing nothing of the worship she had paid to her idol, with its feet—nay, with its whole being—of worthless clay; and concluding with a

statement of her own poor position and barren prospects.

‘Well, well,’ said her kind hostess, encouragingly, when she had quite done, ‘you must come and live with us till you see your way to placing yourself in comfortable quarters. As to ways and means—for I know you are the most practical young woman (outside that weakness which is common to all our sex) that ever cut out a gown or made a bonnet as well as any milliner—you must remember that your presence here is, to begin with, the saving of a doctor’s bill : even during the twelve hours that you have been away, dear Mat has already begun to show signs of running down, like a clock that has lost its winder. Then, your marketing is so much better than mine or Lucy’s.’

‘Pray, pray, don’t tempt me, dear Mrs. Meyrick !’ interrupted Miss Dart, in agonised tones. ‘I have already suffered from the pretence and shadow of love : let me not also suffer from its substance. What you so

hospitably propose would, indeed, be a cruel kindness. There is nothing for me now—unless I would sink into the mire of mere despondency and despair—but work : work with my fingers, if nothing better offers—work for a few pence if not for a few pounds—but work I must have, of some kind, at once. All that I am here to ask of you is a lodging for the night and the loan of my fare to town to-morrow.’

‘As you please, dear Lizzie,’ replied the widow, ‘or rather, as you will, and must. I am well aware that I am quite incompetent to advise you. I must go to Mat, and break to him what has happened : it will be a bitter blow.’

‘Oh, Mrs. Meyrick, spare him ! spare him !’

‘How can I ? How is it possible ? Do you suppose that the sorrow of one he loves can be hidden from him ? He has only to look at you.’

‘I should never have come here,’ murmured Miss Dart, bitterly. ‘My very presence

diffuses wretchedness. Give me at least a few minutes to wash away these traces of weakness.'

'You have half an hour good,' said Mrs. Meyrick, looking at her watch. 'He is in the Pavilion, and will know nothing till dinner time of your arrival. There is a letter for you somewhere; it came by the afternoon's post. I will send it up to your room.'

'A letter from Aunt Jane, no doubt,' thought Miss Dart, wearily. 'She little guesses that I have been to Burrow Hall, and have now left it for ever; that I am coming home to her to-morrow to be another burden to her bowed-down back.'

Ten minutes had passed, and Mrs. Meyrick was standing on the well-worn steps outside the dining-room, where the maid was laying the little table for three; she had been cudgelling her brains for what to say to Matthew that should give him the least

amount of pain, and with small advantage—the winter water grows no warmer for the would-be swimmer's contemplation of it—when suddenly, from the open window overhead, a voice cried, 'Do not trouble to tell Matthew, Mrs. Meyrick. I will speak to him myself.'

If the good lady had been a student of the poets, like her son, it is probable that, at the sound of it, certain verses would have occurred to her descriptive of the linnet's song—

And unto one her note is gay,
And now her little ones have ranged;
And unto one her note is changed,
Because her brood is stolen away.

Ten minutes ago, the voice she heard had been heavy with woe ! now, it was unmistakably clear and bright ; not cheerful merely—as a woman in despondency can make it for another's sake—but with the true bird-note of joy. She looked up and beheld a face radiant with hope—nay, with happiness. 'Not one word to him of what has

happened,' whispered the smiling lips. 'It will not now be necessary.'

'But what will you tell him, my child?'

'Good news, dear Mrs. Meyrick; nothing but good news.'

CHAPTER XXVIII.

CONGRATULATIONS.

THERE are comfortable saws and sayings concerning the limits of human woe which it is to be hoped have some truth in them. ‘The darkest hour is before dawn,’ and ‘When things are at their worst they must needs mend,’ are samples of them. It is, unhappily, sometimes difficult to say which hour is darkest, or to affirm with accuracy at what point things have reached their worst. There are some cases—even many cases—where Fate is desperately malignant, and ‘“Unmerciful disaster” never draws rein.’ But to the majority of us, though it is difficult to believe that ‘The shadow on the dial proves the passing of the trial, proves the presence of the sun,’ it may, I think, be said that after the tempest comes, not only calm, but sunshine ; that there

is some sort of compensation for most of us even in this world.

Elizabeth Dart was not one given to exaggerate her woes. She recognised, even in her misery, that many a woman was not only worse off than herself, as the phrase goes, but had far deeper cause for tears. Was not Mrs. Melburn, for example—of whom, in her ignorance, she had been inclined sometimes to think hard things—one far more to be pitied? Nor was she so foolish as to attempt to disarm misfortune by picturing it to herself as having come to the length of its tether. The very letter now in her hand might bring tidings of illness from Aunt Jane (in the disorganised and morbid condition of her nerves, it seemed only too probable), and infuse still more of bitterness into her cup. Still, that cup was well-nigh full. To be a drudge, and an unsmiling drudge, for life, was the best prospect that life afforded her. She took the letter from Janet's hands with a sigh, half of apprehension, half of despondency. It was not from Aunt Jane, but from

Mr. Argand. She tore it open, less in expectation than in fear to encourage expectation which should leave her more hopeless than before, and out leaped a cheque for twenty pounds. The blood rushed to her face as though it had received a blow. Charity—compensation for disappointment—was her explanation of the phenomenon. She took up the cheque with her fingers as though they had been a pair of tongs, and placed it on the table before her. The letter that accompanied it was a long one, as letters must needs be which apologise for a kindness that may well be mistaken for an insult. She had heard of such misplaced generosity before, in similar cases, and the writer's heart must have been touched by her forlorn condition (which he must have guessed at, however, by the magic of sympathy, since it was certain she had never hinted at it), while his judgment had condemned her contribution :—

‘My dear Madam,—You have, I fear, been thinking me sadly negligent ; but a severe and sudden illness, an attack of low

fever, must be my excuse for not having written to you long ago. My last act and deed in health was to send your admirable article to the printers. I have never seen it since, until I read it in the "Millennium" to-day—a circumstance which (if you knew my editorial habits, which never permit a proof to be in the reading) would have all the force of a medical certificate. Strange to say, it has scarcely ever been out of my thoughts. A hundred times, as I tossed on my restless pillow, have I been at Casterton, on the marsh, on the pier, and in the quaint little town. I have seen the racehorses, clothed or unclothed, at their exercises and at their trial gallops, on the windy downs. I have fought against the Danes, and with them (for delirium has no patriotism) on Battle Hill; I have seen the towns that lie beneath the sea, in your enchanted neighbourhood, and peopled them with inhabitants who have suffered no sea change. What all this phantasmagoria meant as regards your contribution was of course clear enough to me, and needed

no corroboration from without. Still, it will interest you to learn that one of her Majesty's judges—almost the only one in these days who has any claim to be considered a judge in literary matters—has just been calling on me, under the transparent pretence of inquiring after my health, but in reality to learn who is John Javelin.

“Are you aware, my dear sir,” he was so good as to say, “that in the net of your ‘Millennium’ this month (I will not say owing to your absence from your duties, but in spite of it) there shines and shimmers one of those very rare fish called a genius?” “I am well aware of it, my lud,” was my ungracious reply. “I dare say, however, you will be careful not to encourage unreasonable expectations by letting the gentleman know your opinion of him,” was his dry rejoinder. A sarcasm which, I hope, you will do me the justice to say was unmerited.

‘It reminded me, however, of what, but for my illness, would assuredly not have been forgotten—namely, to express to you the very

great admiration I feel for "A Bit of Old England" and its author. It is easy to invest with interest an uncommon subject, but to make a trite one even acceptable is a feat beyond most pens. Your little paper will delight every eye that reads it and possesses the faculty of appreciation. As a mere piece of description, it is perfect—as good as Kingsley's sketches of North Devon scenery. The stores of knowledge which it has laid under contribution for its illustration must strike every one as unusually ample ; but to one who, like myself, is acquainted with your age and sex, they are indeed amazing. The chief, and much more uncommon, merit of the paper lies, however, in its suggestiveness ; in the ordinary reader, it must needs beget thought and reflection, which will be sure to leave him a wiser man than they found him ; but for the more exceptional one, from his lordship the judge aforesaid down to the humble editor who now addresses you, it possesses also a suggestiveness as respects the writer, and endows her with far greater powers even than she has

exhibited. "This is promise rather than performance," is a professional phrase which editors find convenient for mitigating the importunities of youthful aspirants ; but in your case it must be varied. There is plenty of performance in your work, but also a promise far beyond it, and of which, to speak truth without flattery, I can hardly trust myself to write. To say that you will do far better work than "A Bit of Old England," though of its kind it is impossible to conceive anything better, would be to utter a platitude ; indeed, in your own mind, you must well be convinced of the fact. Let me rather predict that you will soon do your talents justice on a wider canvas. In my ignorance of much that I would gladly know concerning your position and prospects, and especially what you yourself consider to be your qualifications for a literary career, I shrink from giving you advice ; but it seems to me you are wasting on a narrow field such powers of observation as nature grants only to a very few in the same generation. After all these eulogiums, I am

afraid the enclosed cheque will appear miserably inadequate. You will think of the fruitseller of Constantinople with his "In the name of the Prophet—Figs!" You must understand, however, that the "Millennium," though thriving, is in its minority, and has not, at present, the means at its disposal to reward genius according to its deserts.—With every kind wish, I am, my dear madam, yours most faithfully and hopefully,

‘FELIX ARGAND.’

Great is the power of deserved praise. It frees the imprisoned Hope, and turns the key on its gaolers, black-browed Care and tyrannous Need. No touch of fairy wand could have effected a transformation more complete than did these words of encouragement in the bosom of Elizabeth Dart. They seemed to give wings to her very being—or rather, they gave her confirmation strong and positive that it had wings. Depressed and downtrodden by circumstance, she had of late begun to doubt her possession of certain gifts of Nature which had from time to time given sign of their pre-

sence ; but now she felt assured that they were hers.

The good man is ignorant of his goodness, or surprised to hear that others call it by such a name ; but in intellectual matters, the case is different : it is probable that every one who possesses exceptional attainments is more or less conscious of their existence. The sense of comparison, which is not absent from even the most modest natures, renders it impossible that it should be otherwise. The recognition from outside is only corroboration. Nevertheless, it brings on the birth.

A glow of confidence—something different and far better than the awakening of ambition—pervaded Miss Dart's mind. 'How happy shall I be able to make Aunt Jane !' was her first unpresumptuous thought ; for, whether she had genius or not, it was certain, as Mrs. Meyrick had said, that she was practical in her ideas. That she was already so happy in herself may need a word of explanation. A woman who has just had her idol shattered should not, it may be suggested, have derived

such exceeding satisfaction from the receipt of twenty pounds ; but it was precisely because it was shattered, and not a fragment of worth or comeliness left of it, that she felt so buoyant. She had not lost a lover, for it was plain she never had one ; she had escaped from a scoundrel of whom no remembrance was left to her, save of his perfidy. Instead of being tossed about the stormy waves of life on the wreck of her poor fortunes, she had suddenly come upon smooth water and a harbour.

As for the cheque—which, my lady reader is thinking, with a smile, will just pay for her winter mantle—I am aware that it did not represent much ; still (for comparison comes in here, too), it represented exactly one quarter of the annual income which Miss Dart was wont to receive from the practice of her scholastic profession ; and she had gained it by a few hours of mental toil. Compared with the other contents of Mr. Argand's envelope, it was indeed of small intrinsic consequence ; but, as an earnest of what hereafter might be won by her pen, it was pregnant with possi-

bilities ; and, if they took at present but the concrete form of ‘making Aunt Jane happy,’ it was, at least, a something.

I think, upon the whole, in short, that that change of tone in which Miss Dart has just exclaimed, ‘Good news, dear Mrs. Meyrick ! Nothing but good news’ was justified.

At the same time, it was difficult to explain to that lady exactly what had happened ; even if Mr. Argand’s letter was not to be considered—as Miss Dart was inclined to hold it—a confidential communication, it was not, as the phrase goes, ‘everybody’s letter’ ; to Mrs. Meyrick, it would be hardly intelligible, and would certainly lack that significance and blossom of promise which it possessed for its recipient. To be told that her guest had had literary employment offered her in London would scarcely account to that good lady for the rise that had taken place in the barometer of her young friend’s spirits ; even in the case of an unquestionable genius and original poet—namely, her son Matthew—the emolument received for literary labour had struck the

widow as inconsiderable, and how much less must (naturally) be given to any other writer—and for mere prose. To Miss Dart, however, no other course presented itself, though in the face of high-wrought expectation, but to tender this weak solution of the mystery of her change of spirits.

‘Well, of course, my dear,’ said Mrs. Meyrick, wondering at the colour in those cheeks which a few minutes ago had been so pale, and at the brightness that had replaced the dew in those gentle eyes. ‘I am glad if you are glad; but if it is only because Mr. Argand has printed the account you tell me you have written of Casterton, and which I am sure I shall be most pleased to read——’

‘He has not only printed it, but paid for it,’ interrupted the authoress, in desperation, but not without a comical sense of disappointment at the manner in which her news had been received; ‘he has sent me twenty pounds for it,’ and she produced the cheque like one who plays his last card.

‘Twenty pounds!’ echoed Mrs. Meyrick,

examining the document with eyes not wholly free from suspicion. ‘Twenty pounds for a description of Casterton?’ with a ludicrous stress upon the word, as though she was not certain that the whole fee simple of the town had not been disposed of; ‘why, the “Millennium” must be made of money.’

‘That is a good many people’s notion of the “Millennium,”’ answered Miss Dart, laughing.

‘But it must be true, my dear,’ was the grave rejoinder. ‘I don’t say a word against your talent for description; but I am so dreadfully afraid there must be some mistake. Why, how long did you take to write it?’

‘Well, the mere writing of it took me about six hours.’

‘Gracious mercy on me! Why, that’s twenty pounds a day—six thousand pounds a year exclusive of Sundays; and I do hope, my dear, whatever they offer you, that you will never work on Sundays.’

Her appeal had a piteous earnestness about it which Miss Dart comprehended at once, and which robbed it of its absurdity. She remem-

bered that the widow had told her how her late husband's working at his busts on Sunday had been the sole cause of disagreement that had ever arisen between them.

‘I don't think working on Sunday will be necessary,’ said Miss Dart, smiling, ‘if I make six thousand a year on week-days. But don't you think that I have now a good excuse for Matthew for my having left Burrow Hall and given up governessing in favour of Grub Street?’

‘Of course, you have ; and, as it happens, he need never know that Mr. Argand's letter found you here ; for ever since you and Mary went this morning, the poor lad has shut himself up in the Pavilion, and never asked a question about the post or anything.’

It may be asked, with incredulity, ‘But was so intelligent a young gentleman as Matthew Meyrick taken in by this pious and simple fraud to save him pain ; and did not the abruptness of the governess's return from Burrow Hall awaken his suspicions?’

For the moment—that is to say, till their

visitor's retirement for the night left him free to question his mother on the whole subject, when the truth, of course, came out—the explanation did satisfy him. That implied invitation from Mr. Argand to come, like a literary Whittington, to seek her fortune in town, seemed to him of the nature of a royal command, which, under the same circumstances, he would have himself obeyed without a moment's delay. Unlike Miss Dart, who was a student of human nature first, and a *littérateur* afterwards, he put letters before everything. In view of that flattering epistle from the Jupiter of the 'Millennium,' all minor matters—including the very existence of such a person as Jefferson Melburn—were dwarfed, and disappeared. In his extreme delight at Miss Dart's good fortune, and in the recognition of the talents which had so long aroused his own amazement by one so capable of judgment as Mr. Argand, he even for a moment omitted to inquire, 'And what does Mary say, and how will she do without you?' This question, which could not have been long postponed,

was providentially averted by the dropping in of Mr. Leyden to dinner. He had heard of Miss Dart's sudden return—within an hour of its occurrence it had, indeed, become the talk of the little town—and its true cause had at once suggested itself to him. 'That scoundrel Jefferson,' was his private reflection, 'must have shown his hand, or rather his cloven foot.'

The antiquary's regard for Miss Dart, and the keen interest he took in her affairs, must be his excuse; but the fact was, curiosity to know how she had discovered the real character of the Major consumed him. The explanation she gave of her sudden return to Casterton seemed to afford him complete satisfaction; but, in reality, in Mrs. Meyrick's face he read ample confirmation of his own views. He saw how the land lay, in short, almost as completely as though he had had a chart of it; and he proved of immense assistance in averting the conversation from dangerous topics. To judge by the talk, indeed, in that little dining-room, one would have imagined it was a pub-

lisher's parlour in Paternoster Row, with the hostess as a sleeping partner. Nor was the subject-matter—the prospects of a literary life—one whit less interesting because not one of the company had any knowledge of it ; information on the point would only have clipped the wings of their imagination, or, perhaps, even plucked them.

As to material results, the estimate arrived at by Mrs. Meyrick, though not exceeded, was held to be reasonable and, on the whole, satisfactory, save by Miss Dart herself.

‘ If my income ever reaches a thousand pounds,’ she modestly observed, ‘ I think, Mr. Leyden, that the stars will have justified themselves.’

‘ Certainly not, my dear young lady,’ was the confident rejoinder. ‘ Literature will do all it can for you, no doubt ; but the stars, you may take my word for it, don't put themselves out—I mean, interfere in human affairs—for a thousand a year.’

CHAPTER XXIX.

A NEW DEPARTURE.

MISS DART gave way with little reluctance to Mrs. Meyrick's earnest entreaties that she should remain at the Look-out another day. She was among such friends as she was not likely to find elsewhere, and whom she would, perhaps, never see again. She felt the need of an interval of rest after that day of incident and emotion, and before she commenced a life which, with all its promise, must be new and strange. It was also necessary, of course, that Aunt Jane, though she had no preparations to make for her reception, should be apprised of her coming and its cause. Besides, there were two other letters, of even more importance, to be despatched, such as could be more conveniently written in that

peaceful place and time than after the conclusion of a journey, or in the confusion of an arrival.

One of them was to Mary Melburn, the other to Mr. Argand. The former was far the shorter, and yet by no means brief. It was not necessary to tell so near and dear a friend that nothing short of dire necessity had compelled her abrupt desertion of her, under circumstances in which she could so ill be spared ; and to write of the Major's conduct she could not compel her pen ; it was a humiliation for her to recall his name. The whole explanation of his deceit and treachery she left to Mrs. Meyrick—to be sent by the same post to her sister-in-law—with a well-founded confidence that it would lose none of its baseness in the telling. She took it for granted that Mary would understand that her separation from Burrow Hall was complete and final ; but of the lasting nature of her love for her late pupil and companion she gave full assurance.

‘That there is no need for these protesta-

tions, my dear Mary,' she wrote, 'I am well aware ; I make them only because it is a selfish pleasure to do so ; but, as to your mother, it is only too necessary to express my very high regard and respect for her, and my gratitude for all her kindness. Whatever errors and follies I may seem to have committed under her roof, there is none that I so deeply reproach myself with as my misapprehension of her gentle and noble nature. I sometimes thought her cold and constrained to me, when, as I now perceive, there must have seemed to her much in my conduct deserving of the severest censure. It would be impertinence in me to address her personally on such a topic, but I pray you to let her know what distress of mind this reflection causes me. In what anxiety and alarm you may be at this moment on her account, I dare not picture to myself, and yet, as she herself will tell you, I cannot be with you. I go to London to-morrow to begin life afresh, under good auspices.' (Here followed an account of her literary prospects.) 'But,

whether failure or success attend me, I shall never forget you, or fail to sympathise with your joys and sorrows. To-day, as I feel too well, your sky is dark, and your horizon darker still. Alas! I can only give you my prayers. With what dread and fear shall I open your letter to-morrow night (for I know you have written), and yet how thankfully shall I welcome it!’

To Mr. Argand she was as frank as she had hitherto been reticent. She made no attempt to restrain the expressions of gratitude that naturally fell from her pen. She felt as though she were addressing a parent; for did she not owe to him a new life? She pictured him to herself a venerable personage, who, laden with the experience of at least half a century of literary toil, still preserved a tender heart, and delighted in the encouragement of budding talent; a sort of nineteenth-century Dr. Johnson, who might almost have patted her on the head paternally, and called her ‘my dear’ without offence. She plainly told him that his letter had decided her to

adopt literature as a profession, but at the same time acquitting him of all responsibility in the matter. It was a project she had had in her mind ever since the first moment she began to think, though he had given it shape and solidity. It was only in her enumeration of what she judged to be her qualifications for a literary calling that she omitted, less from modesty than ignorance, to state the whole truth. She had the sagacity to understand that a great deal of the reading to which she had been accustomed, and which is known as 'high-class' education, is only an encumbrance to the mind. She did not give herself credit for the acumen which had, in fact, enabled her to select from the unwieldy mass what was best and brightest. Most persons of the scholastic class, whether male or female, are apt to load themselves with weighty but unnecessary information, which they drop, like paving-stones, on the toes of their less learned acquaintances, and are therefore shunned, with reason, by society at large. The faculty of intellectual digestion is denied

to them ; they belong to that increasing army, not of martyrs, but of those who make martyrs of other people, who are educated above their wits. Miss Dart, a Jack Horner, without his priggish egotism, had picked out the plums from her literary cake : whatever was adapted for illustration or for argument she had retained for use ; and, with an instinct of separation and discernment not inferior to that which is ascribed (not always, unhappily, with truth) to the delicate sensibility of our molars, had rejected the rest. Her views of life, if not original, were untrammelled by convention ; she had already suffered for this in person ; but, on the other hand, they gave a wider range to her ideas, which offered a curious contrast to the narrow limits of her experience. As regards the last, however, though undoubtedly there is an advantage in ‘seasoned brains,’ its benefits are liable to be exaggerated. It is possible to have seen a great deal of human life, especially if it is of the same description, and still to remain intensely stupid. Intuition, which is a sort

of experience by inspiration, had hitherto supplied its place with Miss Dart ; and with such persons, not only does a very little experience, especially if it be only sufficiently various, go a long way, but a very considerable knowledge of human affairs can be acquired by reading. Though the newspaper had been in the *Index Expurgatorius* while she was a pupil, when she became a teacher she had been free to read it ; and she had, with her usual judgment in the matter of selection, taken full advantage of the permission. By this means she had made herself well acquainted with political and social matters that are commonly but little studied by persons of her age and sex ; she took an interest in them, indeed, which was almost phenomenal, and, reversing the usual formula, might have been well described as ‘ of the world, although not in it.’

Introspection, however, was not easy to her, for she was far too natural to be self-conscious ; and she found that in writing of herself to Mr. Argand—which she felt it due

to him to do—she had undertaken a difficult task. She withheld from him, in ignorance, much that it was important to him to know ; but only in one thing did she mislead him. ‘I am afraid,’ she wrote, ‘that I have no imagination’—a statement which had its consequences. She made it in all simplicity ; but, as a matter of fact, she had often amused herself—having no other means of recreation—by imagining an Elizabeth Dart in quite other circumstances than her real ones, and surrounded by beings of her own creation, as different from her acquaintances in the flesh as fancy could form them. Of this practice she had anything but a high opinion, and, in fact, was ashamed of it : it came under the category of day-dreams, and was to be discouraged.

In conclusion, Miss Dart made no apology for inflicting these details upon her correspondent—for had he not requested them of her?—but, though giving her London address, she begged him to spare himself the trouble of a reply. ‘You have given me at least as

much encouragement as is good for me,' she wrote, 'and there is no fear that the grateful soil will not produce a harvest; though whether it be worth the reaping, it will be for you to judge.'

By that morning's post the copy of the 'Millennium' containing Miss Dart's paper arrived at the Look-out, and, in spite of her protest, was read aloud by Roger Leyden to the rest.

'I had no idea what an interesting place we lived in,' was Mrs. Meyrick's remark on it.

'My picture does not strike you, then, as very like the original?' observed Miss Dart; not on the whole, perhaps, a very happy rejoinder; but she was hampered with a sense of embarrassment from which no young author whose work is the subject of discussion in her own presence can be wholly free.

'Nay, I think it is more like than the original,' was the naïve reply. 'You have made me recognise beauties in its dear old face which had hitherto escaped me, and I

seem to love it in consequence more than ever.'

'Let us have no more criticism after that,' said Roger Leyden, triumphantly; 'Mrs. Meyrick has gone to the root of the matter.'

'It was hardly possible to go wrong with such materials,' observed Miss Dart, modestly: 'even a journeyman who is so fortunate as to find the best Carrara ready to his practised hand must turn out something to be admired; there is always the marble; and I am sure, but for you, Mr. Leyden, one half of my sketch at least would not have been written.'

'You have touched nothing, my dear young lady, that you have not adorned,' answered the antiquary, not gallantly, but in tones of quiet conviction. 'What do you think, Matthew?'

'I am thinking, if the writer of that delightful paper is a journeyman,' sighed Matthew, 'what am *I*?'

'Considering the quarter from which it comes—a gentleman "who writes himself," as Sheridan says,' remarked Roger Leyden,

clapping his hands, 'I think that ought to content you, Miss Dart : eulogiums can no further go.'

It may be thought that the approval of private friends upon a literary effort does not count for much. But, at all events, it is a rare kind of praise. If a prophet is held in small honour among his own belongings, an author is commonly held in no honour at all. Those of his own household, or his immediate neighbours, are the last to perceive his merit ; it is only when it has received public recognition that they swell the note of praise. It seems curious, even to themselves, that, 'though they lived next door,' they 'never knew this famous man before.' A good many first works, it is true, have been published, if their author is to be believed, at the 'request of friends' ; but that is at least as often the offspring of imagination as the productions themselves. In the present case, these critics on the hearth, though they were but three, were unusually representative : the antiquary, the poet, and Mrs.

Meyrick, each belonged to a very different class from the others ; and their common opinion was, therefore, all the more propitious. Indeed, had she remained at Casterton, there would have been reason to fear for Miss Dart, at the very outset of her career, the unhappy fate which only too often befalls the veteran of letters—under the focus of an admiring clique to become ashes, in which his ‘wonted fires’ do *not* live.

The dangerous ordeal was, however, in her case very brief; and the flattery of the little circle was soon forgotten in its kindness. The wrench of parting with her Casterton friends was far greater than it had seemed the day before, when she had been going on a shorter journey, and to dwell with those who had a near connection with themselves. She might now be bidding them good-bye for ever !

The farewell interview between Matthew and herself was affectionate, and even tender ; but their talk was not of one another. He spoke of his love for Mary, and of its hope-

lessness, in a manner that wrung her heart ; yet she could not but rejoice that he had so spoken to her—it was the highest compliment, she felt, that friendship could pay.

Mrs. Meyrick embraced her with tears and kisses. If good wishes were a burden, she would have sunk under the load. Who was she, and what had she done, she asked of herself, to be treated with such confidence and affection ?

At the railway station, miles away, the first to meet her, as she stepped out of the fly, was Roger Leyden, a man who always avoided all places, as she knew, where men do congregate.

It was the first time in her lonely life that any one had troubled himself to ‘see her off’ by the train ; and it touched her very much.

‘It is nothing but selfishness on my part,’ protested the antiquary. ‘I worship the rising sun. You will one day travel as princes (and railway directors) do, by “a special.” The stars have said it.’ Then, as

he pressed her hand at the carriage-window, ' You will not forget your friends at the Look-out, I know. Write to poor Matthew now and then—you will be the only link between him and the world without.'

It was this, she felt, that he had come to impress upon her ; for his love for the lad was great.

Hitherto, her journeys (and some of them had been long ones) had been dull enough ; her thoughts had been without speculation. But now it was far otherwise ; the horizon of her life had been enlarged ; her future was full of hope.

Presently, she arrived at the junction, where she had alighted on her way to Burrow Hall. She shrank back into a corner of the compartment, lest by some chance Major Melburn should be there. She was as safe from his intrusion as though she had been in a balloon. He was one of those men whom it is inconceivable to imagine in a second-class carriage ; but it was possible he might be on the platform. That danger past, her thoughts

reverted to those connected with him. How were matters going with Mrs. Melburn and poor Mary ? she wondered. Was it possible that to the girl's other troubles was added the hateful presence of Mr. Winthrop ? The Major, indeed, had assured her that it would not be so ; but his word was as worthless as himself.

How wretched was the position of those two women, which she had at one time imagined to be enviable ! If there are compensations in one lot, there are drawbacks in another : only it is Heaven which sends the former, and man who too often creates the latter.

But for that serpent, Jefferson Melburn, Burrow Hall might have been, if not an Eden, at least a happy home. How much better would it be for the world if that ' Bill for the Abolition of Scoundrels ' could be passed which one of her favourite authors had declared to be so indispensable ! She found herself drawing a comparison between the Major and her unknown friend, Mr. Argand ; both,

perhaps, with equal gifts, but one of whom had used and the other misused them. Had the one man, she wondered, been always inclined to good, and the other to evil? The religious world, or a portion of it, had a theory that a man receives his call direct and on a sudden from Heaven: was it possible that a call could come from the other direction with equal abruptness? Could Jefferson Melburn have ever said his prayers at his mother's knee; have experienced the enthusiasms and illusions of youth; and now, all of a sudden, become unwholesome and corrupt? Or had he been born bad? She knew the proverb, '*Nemo repente*,' &c., and even its free translation by the rather unjust judge ('It takes five years to make an attorney'); but she was not one to accept proverbs with passive submission. Upon the whole, she was inclined to picture the man as a Mephistopheles. She dismissed him from her mind with a shudder, and turned her thoughts to his antithesis—as she imagined him—Felix Argand. What sort of person,

she wondered, was he in appearance ? A man probably advanced in years, and ‘crowned with reverence and the silver hair’ ? She could never tell him how much he had done for her, or how grateful she was to him ; but, if ever she had the opportunity, she would tell his wife. How proud that wife must be of him !

In the midst of these speculations, which had devoured the way for her, the houses sprang up like magic on either side, each with its little strip of garden running down to the railway line like brooks to a river. The train began to slacken speed, and the well-known roar of London to greet her ears. It seemed to have a wider and a deeper meaning for them than it had ever had heretofore.

CHAPTER XXX.

IN THE MARYLEBONE ROAD.

AT what date the road called 'New' in London may have had a right to bear that title, I have no idea, but it was presumably at an epoch when architecture was not in its most flourishing condition. It is, perhaps, for a thoroughfare of such pretensions, the least cheerful to be found in the metropolis ; yet, to have an end is denied to it. At different stages of its melancholy career, it has, indeed, adopted various titles ; but the 'long, unlovely street' never loses its identity. For the most part, it has no shops ; but now and then a deviser of memorials for the dead has turned his strip of garden into a graveyard full of cenotaphs. Those, however, who dwell in that western portion of this locality,

termed the Marylebone Road, are uncheered by these mementos ; there is nothing to remind them in it that there is any termination to their monotonous existence. Formerly there was, doubtless, more life in the street ; but all its traffic has been absorbed by the Metropolitan Railway, and is now carried underground. There are gratings through which the astonished stranger suddenly sees columns of steam arise as from a geyser, which makes still denser the atmosphere around. On a wet Sunday, indeed, to one who finds himself, for the first time, in this *Arabia deserta*, it seems amazing to behold so many iron railings and not a single suicide depending from them.

Mankind, however, is mentally very independent of local circumstance, and it is probable that there are as many happy households, in proportion, in murky Newcastle as in that sunlit Isle of Wight, which we call, not inappropriately, the garden of England.

Aunt Jane (Mrs. Richter), for whose hospitable roof (for her lodgings were at the

top of the house) Miss Elizabeth Dart was bound, dwelt in the Marylebone Road, and never found the locality to affect her spirits ; neither did the weather, nor even the east wind. As science now packs its electricity for nightly use, so she kept within her a store of sunshine which was permanent and inexhaustible. The objects on which it shone were few, but that was not her fault ; her heart had warmth enough for a world. Even her landlady, Mrs. Birk, who was not of a material which naturally absorbs heat and light of that sort, shared it ; so did her own little maid, Annie ; so did her cat, Apollinaris. It was so called, not after the famous drinking water, but the Syrian bishop of that name, whose life and works her late husband had edited with great applause, but unhappily at his own expense. The Rev. Tristram Richter had been a scholar of great erudition, and might probably have proved the excellence of learning when house and land were gone and spent (in publishing) had time permitted, but he had died in the plenitude

of his theological honours almost penniless. More fortunate than many of his cloth, however, he had not left his widow with encumbrances, and with the fragment of his fortune and a small annuity which remained to her, she might have lived comfortably enough in some humble cottage of the Devonshire village of which he had been the vicar, and which she loved for his sake and for its own, but for the sudden death of her brother, Thomas Dart, a lieutenant on half-pay ; this gentleman left her all he had to leave—his only child, Elizabeth. Under such circumstances some persons would have declined to administer, but Aunt Jane would always have it that no one had ever received a handsomer legacy.

For the education of the girl, in such a manner that she might gain her own living when the annuity should terminate, the widow at once came up to town. No one ever knew what it cost her to leave that grave in the sunny churchyard, and all the memories that hung about it with the creepers and the

flowers. It was a sacrifice that sent up no incense save to the All-seeing Eye. If her dear Lizzie had not had a will far stronger than her own, she would have kept her long after she was of an age to keep herself, and never grudged the cost, which, small as it was, her scanty means could ill afford; but the girl's natural hunger for books was whetted by a desire for independence; not that she felt the weight of obligation, laid on her by the hand of love as lightly as a flower, but that she yearned to prove herself not unworthy of the pains bestowed upon her. At an age much earlier than such posts are usually obtained, she became teacher at the ladies' college at which she had been pupil; and, but for the entreaties of the principal, who understood her value, would have gone out as a governess long before she had volunteered her services to Mrs. Melburn. Having once removed the burden of her maintenance from Aunt Jane's shoulders, it was no wonder that Lizzie had regarded her withdrawal from her late position with shrinking reluctance;

or that she had hailed with such thankfulness and joy the new career that had so promisingly presented itself; but, as for Aunt Jane herself, the idea that she had got rid of a responsibility never even so much as crossed her mind. That Lizzie was in good spirits about something or other, which she herself did not understand, save that it had some connection with writing for a magazine, was of course a gratifying circumstance; but what delighted her, and filled her mind to the exclusion of all speculation, was the thought that Lizzie was coming back to her much sooner than she could reasonably have expected, and was even probably to remain at home for good. To say that her four rooms were swept and garnished for her niece's reception would have been a reflection on Annie's handiwork, by whom they were always kept in a state of cleanliness only seen elsewhere in gaols and lighthouses; but certain arrangements were made of an exceptional and triumphal kind. The doorstep of the house, which only so far belonged

to her that she had a right to step on it, was washed and scrubbed—an operation which had not taken place within the memory of any inmate of the establishment ; half a dozen flowers in pots were purchased of a peripatetic flower-seller and placed in the front windows ; while in Lizzie's own little room there was hung on the whitewashed walls, like a tablet, a card with 'Welcome Home' upon it, painted by Aunt Jane's own hands. The widow had her gifts, among which was a taste for decoration in colours, which as applied to birthday cards, and even doyleys, she had been wont to think highly of till she had tested its market value: it was the one modest attempt she had made to add to her resources, and, having proved a failure, it now only served to amuse her leisure hours. Accomplishments, no matter what they may cost to acquire, are the most unsaleable of all commodities. Still, Mrs. Richter had good cause to be thankful, having no great turn for books, that, after certain daily duties among the poor in neighbouring Lisson

Grove were over, she could sit down before her cottage-piano, or before her little easel, and forget the lonely time. The widow, by nature chatty and cheerful, had found enjoyment in such society as her Devonshire home afforded ; but now in all the wide world of London there was no one she could call her friend. She did not repine ; it was only as if between her and her fellow-creatures, save her Lizzie only, a door had been softly closed ; but she had her moments of wistful recollection.

Mrs. Richter was still, for a widow, young ; and if she had lost much of the quiet beauty for which she had once been remarkable, she had acquired other, if less obvious, charms—the impress of a blameless life, and of a mind that occupies itself in thought for others, could be read in her gentle face and tender eyes. She was a little creature, cast, indeed, in almost a fairy mould, so that Lizzie used to wonder as a child how so much of goodness could be packed in so small a space ; her voice was sweet and musical, and, without

being at all distinguished-looking, no one who had eyes to see could doubt that Aunt Jane was a gentlewoman. Though she had left off her widow's weeds, her dress was of the simplest, yet she always looked superior to her surroundings. She reminded Lizzie of one of those silver-hued and delicate birds, such as one sees exposed for sale in cramped, rude cages, in low neighbourhoods—captive and out of their element, but full of song.

For half an hour before her niece could reasonably be expected, Aunt Jane was watching for her from the window with eagerness; the vans and waggons aroused illogical expectation, and every passing cab gave her a pang of disappointment. At last, the long-looked-for vehicle stopped at the gate.

‘Run, Annie, run!’ cried Aunt Jane, ‘and open the door for Miss Lizzie; she has not seen a black face for so long that Susan’s may frighten her.’

Susan was one of many Susans who had occupied the post of maid-of-all-work in Mrs. Birk’s establishment; she was not, as

the widow's words would have seemed to imply, a negress ; but constant contact with grimy substances, including black lead, had almost utterly obliterated her native hue. It was, no doubt, more pleasant to Lizzie to be welcomed by a face she knew.

Mrs. Richter's reception of her was little less than ecstatic. 'How lovely you look, my dear !' she murmured between her caresses ; 'how fresh and how sweet you are : it is as though the summer itself had come to visit me !'

'That is the flowers,' returned Lizzie, laughing, and producing from her basket a charming bouquet, which Mrs. Meyrick had insisted on her plucking from the garden at the Look-out. She had also selected some seaweed from the shore that morning, for she knew her aunt's passion for 'the smell of the sea.' It was impossible to imagine simpler offerings ; but we do not estimate the gifts of those we love by their value, and Aunt Jane derived as much pleasure from them as any diamond tiara would have given her.

‘How charming it was of you to think of me, darling! What exquisite flowers! Oh dear, oh dear’ (sniffing as though she would sniff her nose off), ‘I seem to be in Devonshire again—and see, here is the seaweed we used to call the barometer. I will hang it up on a nail, and it will tell us what weather is coming as well as anything from Negretti and Zambra’s.’

Then there was a banquet—not of herbs, yet certainly one where love was; where-with Mrs. Birk had nothing to do, but in which Annie, who was admirable at braising a chicken and making bread sauce, had outdone herself. ‘I must ask you to carve it, Lizzie, as you always used to do,’ said the hostess. She would gladly have spared her guest the trouble, but the fact was her hands were trembling with emotion, and the tears stood in her eyes and interfered with her vision.

‘To think that the old days have come again,’ she murmured, softly, when the feast was over; and the words were so freighted

with thankfulness that they seemed the natural termination of her simple 'Grace.'

'They will be even brighter and better days, I hope,' said Lizzie.

'I don't know. God is very good to me, as it is, my dear. Tell me all about it.'

What she meant was that Lizzie should tell her of her new hopes and expectations. She had already been informed by letter of her niece's reasons for leaving Burrow Hall, and she well understood that was a subject which it would be painful to her to discuss. She knew that the girl had been treated ill—nay, infamously—and her gentle soul had thrilled with indignation upon her account ; but she was content to wait till Lizzie chose to speak upon the matter, or to know no more if she chose to be silent. She had not that greediness for painful details which belongs to vulgar natures. Little by little, she did, in fact, hear afterwards all that had happened ; the topic was not so painful to the girl as it was abhorrent ; but Aunt Jane received it almost without comment ; it shocked her

general sense of rectitude that such things should be suffered to be done in the world, or that a man like Jefferson Melburn should exist. Even in dispositions the most devout, the idea of misgovernment will suggest itself when Fate ill-uses without cause those who are near and dear to them.

There was no allusion, now, however, as we have said, to the author of Lizzie's woes ; the talk between the two women was confined to the bright side of matters ; albeit, even there, though there was no embarrassment of course, the girl found it difficult to give a reason for the faith that was in her that should satisfy the hearer. The calling of literature was connected in Mrs. Richter's mind with anything but success. She associated it with the ' Life and Works of Apollinaris,' of which she had made a fair copy for the printer with her own hand. The four handsome volumes of which the work had consisted now stood on her bookshelf, bound expressly for her by the author's orders in grateful acknowledgment of her assistance. Under that very roof she

had once beheld a page of it from another copy which had envired a half-pound of Dorset butter. Its recognition had been one of the most painful events of her existence. If her husband's genius had failed to make its mark, or, at all events, to make anything else, what hope could there be for Lizzie?

The stress that her niece laid on the fact that the 'Millennium' was an organ by no means of a fugitive or ephemeral character gave her anything but encouragement. The object of the publication of the 'Life of Apollinaris' had been anything but ephemeral. It had been directed, for its prefix had said so, 'against those false principles of Arianism which were as prevalent now as they had ever been'; there had been nothing fugitive about it save the fate of the work itself. She pictured Mr. Felix Argand as a venerable student, elaborating tomes of theological controversy which were published (very judiciously) in a periodical form, so that the issue might be arrested at any moment.

She was far too tender-hearted to damp her companion's obvious delight in the prospects of a literary career ; but she could not help showing that her own expectations of success were by no means so sanguine. When, in despair of getting her to take more cheerful views, Lizzie tried the same experiment that had been so successful with Mrs. Meyrick, by bringing out from her purse eighteen golden sovereigns, the remainder of Mr. Argand's cheque, and placing them in rouleaux on the table, Aunt Jane did, indeed, exhibit considerable astonishment. She had never seen so much money in specie since, as a child, she had been taken over the Bank of England.

‘Do you really mean to tell me,’ she gasped, ‘that Mr. Argand gave you that for a description of Casterton ?’

‘He did, indeed, and, as I have said, has invited me to become a regular contributor.’

The idea that crossed the widow's mind was that the gentleman must be mad ; that his relatives would probably interfere, and the sovereigns have to be refunded ; but this

suggestion was obviously too uncomplimentary to Lizzie's talents to be expressed.

As truth could not be entirely sacrificed, she compromised the matter.

'Well, it is only to be hoped, my dear,' she said, 'that the man is made of money.'

Lizzie laughed at this naïve misgiving, which was certainly not of a nature to flatter her self-conceit.

'You are evidently supposing, my dear aunt, that Mr. Argand is a wealthy philanthropist whose humour it is to remunerate young authors on a scale of magnificence utterly unjustified by the circumstances of the case. A kinder-hearted or more generous man I believe it would be difficult to find ; but I do not think it probable—and, indeed, it would be a kindness of a very mistaken sort—that he has purposely misled me as to the pecuniary value of what I have written for him, or may write. If I understand the matter, the 'Millennium' is a periodical which has taken a high position in the world of letters, and is not only very valuable as a property, but

capable of becoming much more so. Without detracting from Mr. Argand's generosity (of which I am as conscious as I am of his admirable behaviour to myself and poor Matthew in other respects), I am encouraged to hope that there has been nothing of charity about it, but that my assistance may really be worth the price he puts upon it, and which you are disposed to think a fancy value.'

'I didn't say that, dear,' put in Aunt Jane, hurriedly; 'only when I remember what your dear uncle used to receive for his contributions to the "Lady's Casket," for which, in his lighter moments, he would occasionally pen a stanza——'

'But, my dear aunt,' interrupted Lizzie, with just the least touch of professional irritation, 'the "Millennium" is not the "Lady's Casket," nor anything at all like it. It addresses a very select and intelligent audience; and though, it is true, it has done me the honour of accepting my little paper, such trivialities (which from one point of view gives me the greater satisfaction) are, as a general rule, altogether

out of its line. I believe that I am the first woman that has ever written a line for it.'

The look of admiration with which Aunt Jane received this piece of news was not one of entire approval: she was proud of her niece's achievement, but just the least bit scandalised by it. It was one thing to have a Hannah More in the family, but quite another to have a Harriet Martineau.

When, a few minutes afterwards, Lizzie produced her copy of the 'Millennium,' the name of John Javelin was not to be found in it. She rightly judged that to have written under such a pseudonym would appear to Aunt Jane—a babe, to whom *Revalenta Arabica* itself would have seemed like strong meat—only a little less audacious than to dress in man's clothes.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A VISITOR.

THOUGH Elizabeth Dart was no exception to the rule, that, upon the whole, our private affairs are at least as interesting to us as those of other people, she had given many a thought to Mary Melburn since they parted, and looked forward with great anxiety to the news of her which she knew the morning's post would bring. Her apprehension on her friend's account had, indeed, been almost morbid ; and it was quite a relief to her to see that the envelope which contained the communication in question had no black edge. If anything should happen to Mrs. Melburn—and it was only too likely that, within a very short time, it would happen—how painful and perilous would be her daughter's condition!

She would not, indeed, be friendless ; but her foes would be of her own household. Surrounded with luxury, and with all the supposed advantages of position, how preferable seemed Mary's lot to her own ; and yet, in truth, how much less was it to be envied ! Her very handwriting had not its customary firmness, and seemed to speak of anxiety and depression.

‘ My dear, dear Lizzie,’ her letter began, ‘ your pencilled note was the first news I got of your departure, which saved me, doubtless, an agony of apprehension ; yet to feel that you have gone, and to know why, seems to fill my cup of misery almost to the brim. At the same time, the thought that you have left this place, with all its painful associations, and are safe with those you love, is a great comfort to me. I am shocked and ashamed that one, unhappily connected with me by so near a tie of blood, should have behaved to you in the manner Aunt Louie's letter, just arrived, reveals to us. That he should have been

capable of such conduct does not, alas! surprise me; but of the fact in which his baseness consists I need not tell you that both mamma and I were entirely ignorant. He is gone; and the very atmosphere seems the purer for it. Papa—into whose hands mamma put Aunt Louisa's letter—and he had a stormy parting; and, I trust, we are rid of his presence, and of all belonging to him, for some time to come. But, Lizzie dear, though we are so far relieved, the Angel of Death is hovering over us. I can no longer conceal from myself that dear mamma is about to leave us. The sense of my coming desolation will, I know, excuse the brevity with which I have spoken above of your departure from us. Great as would be the comfort of your presence, it would be selfish to wish you were with us. It is even selfish in me to mourn for what is about to happen. Not even I can tell what dear mamma has endured for years on my account; but I know that she has spent her life for me—nay, more—that she has striven to prolong it for my sake, when she

would rather have been at rest. There are some things which one cannot write or speak about, even to our dearest friends ; oh, Lizzie, life to some of us is, indeed, a pitiful story ! And if this world should be the end of it, their case would be sad indeed. I try to be quite sure that I shall see her again : with that sweet smile, without its weariness ; with those loving eyes, without that yearning which comes into them whenever they rest on me. But even that is hard. Everything seems hard just now. I remember your wise advice ; but there are times when “to take short views” is to be most despairing ; for, in doing so, one only beholds a grave. She has begged me to ask your forgiveness—I suppose, for not having warned you of a danger which she never suspected—and in such a voice, Lizzie ! “The voice, in pain and sickness, of fancied faults afraid.” I scarcely know whether to ask you to write her a few lines or not. You have so much the better judgment, and will do whatever you think best as well as kindest. Dr. Dalling has just been. He

says there is no change "at present," and that the patient may take "whatever she seems to have a fancy for." One knows but too well what that phrase means ; instead of "having little meaning, though the words are strong," the words are weak, but their sense is terrible. It is said that sickness makes the patient selfish : no one who sees mamma would believe that ; but I feel that it has made the watcher selfish. Not a word have I written yet of the bright prospects which Aunt Louise tells us are dawning on your dear self. Believe me, however, that I congratulate you on them from the bottom of my heart ; what little ray of gladness comes to me in this dark time is reflected from them. God bless you, dearest.—Ever your affectionate friend,

‘MARY MELBURN.

‘P.S.—When you write, tell me how you left all at Casterton. Aunt Louisa says nothing of herself. I am sure they must have felt your leaving them.’

‘All at Casterton’ was a periphrasis for

Mat, of whom, perhaps, under present circumstances, the poor girl felt it almost a sin to be thinking. She was evidently in that unnatural condition (very different from a merely artificial one) which the apprehension of a great calamity often induces. In such cases, strange to say, what are called easy circumstances are an aggravation. If Mary, when forbidden, as she was by Dr. Dalling, to watch by her mother's bedside beyond a certain time, had been compelled to occupy herself with any employment, it would have been the better for her. Her mind had only itself to feed upon.

With Elizabeth Dart the very contrary was the case ; a circumstance which had often kept her spirits from failing, and of late had enabled her to recover from a moral shock, which, in another less favourably constituted, might have left fatal effects. She had not only 'resources of her own,' as is said of a woman who knits, or a man who planes, but took a wide and far-reaching interest in many matters.

Her very exclusion from the world enabled her to take at least an independent view of it. Though her disposition was essentially feminine, she busied herself (for it was not a mere amusement with her) with reflections upon affairs that are with most of her sex out of the region of speculation. The contrast between the governess of the present day and her prototype, whose text-book was 'Mangnall's Questions,' was scarcely greater than that between Elizabeth Dart and her contemporaries of her own calling. She had no love of learning for its own sake, but used it as a stepping-stone for thought, and her thoughts were essentially of the present. In calling her 'practical' Mrs. Meyrick had unconsciously struck the key-note of an instrument the nature and compass of which were far beyond her comprehension. Adaptability is one of the chief attributes of the practical nature, and Elizabeth Dart possessed it in perfection: she could 'get on' with almost anybody, but when she had love and esteem for them, she was sympathy itself. Aunt Jane was never

puzzled by her niece's conversation, or entertained any suspicion that her ideas moved on a higher plane than her own. Lizzie interested herself in matters of the house, and that question of ways and means which forms so important an item in the lives of most of us, as though there were no greater topics of interest under the sun. In Mary's letter was inclosed a cheque for the salary to the date of her departure, 'with Mr. Melburn's compliments and thanks,' which, with the remainder of Mr. Argand's honorarium, placed the little household in quite a flourishing condition of finance. In vain had Mrs. Richter protested against Lizzie considering herself otherwise than as a guest. 'We are a joint-stock company, Aunt Jane,' was the firm rejoinder; 'and every speculation must be undertaken in concert.' It may not have been a very stable firm, or capable of standing any considerable commercial crisis, but the partners got on much more smoothly together than is usual in the City.

On the second afternoon of Lizzie's arrival,

there occurred what was little less than a portent in that humble establishment: a visitor called. Susan appeared bearing a card, with a mourning edge promptly executed by her own fingers, and the curt introduction, 'Please, mum, Miss Argand, to see Miss Dart.' Lizzie was in her own room, so that on Mrs. Richter fell the first brunt of the interview. It was years since any one had thought it worth their while to place her in the position of hostess, and, for the moment, she was a little perturbed.

'I ought, perhaps, to have asked permission to present myself,' said the visitor, gently, perceiving the other's confusion; 'but my brother was so adverse to delay.'

'Mr. Argand has been very kind to my niece, she tells me,' said Mrs. Richter.

'From what he tells me, the obligation, if one exists at all, is quite on the other side,' said Miss Argand, graciously. 'What makes me a little ashamed of my intrusion here is the consciousness that self-interest, or, at all events, my brother's interest, is at the bottom

of it. The "Millennium" is, as you are, doubtless, aware, of his own creation ; and the writer of any article which has drawn so much public attention to it, as has happened in the case of Miss Dart's paper, must necessarily evoke, not only his professional sympathy, but his gratitude. Less than this,' she added, in less formal tones, 'I dare not say, lest I should fall under my brother's displeasure. We think ourselves most fortunate in being your neighbours, for it is only a stone's throw to Harewood Square ; and I hope we shall have many opportunities of becoming better acquainted.'

'You are very good,' murmured Mrs. Richter. The other's flow of words was rather too much for the little lady, and, as it were, carried her off her feet. 'I am sure we shall be very glad to call.'

'And not only to call, I hope. We look forward to seeing a great deal of you and your accomplished niece. She must be really a most marvellous personage.'

'I don't know as to that,' returned the

widow, smiling ; ‘ but, then, I am no judge. I can only say she is the dearest and best of girls——’

‘ Girls?’ interrupted Miss Argand, quickly. ‘ I understood from my brother that she had been engaged in tuition for many years. You don’t mean to say that Miss Dart is a girl?’

‘ You can judge for yourself,’ answered the widow, smiling ; for the amazement evinced by her visitor as Lizzie entered the room was most amusing to witness. Miss Argand was a lady of about forty years of age, tall and rather angular, but with a face full of expression. It had hitherto worn a most gracious air, tinged, however, by a little touch of patronage ; but it now looked not only surprised but troubled.

‘ Miss Dart, I believe ; though I can scarcely credit it,’ she exclaimed, as she held out her hand. ‘ Is it possible that you are so young?’

‘ I do not feel “ so young,” or, at all events, not criminally young,’ said Lizzie, smiling.

‘ It is a drawback which disappears in

time,' said Mrs. Richter, cheerfully. The compliment to her niece which the visitor's words obviously implied was pleasing to her ; while the tone of disappointment, and almost of rebuke, in which it was conveyed, escaped her notice.

'What amazes me is that, at your years, you could have written as you have done,' explained Miss Argand. 'I do not refer to your talents—for talents may belong to any one—but the manner in which you have treated the subject. Where on earth did you get all your queer information about the training of racehorses, for example ?'

'I used to see them training on the downs,' said Lizzie, quietly, 'and then I made inquiries.'

'And about the Danes ?—there were no Danes to tell you anything.'

'I have a friend who has made the subject his own, and who was so good as to place his knowledge at my service.'

'Some old antiquary, I suppose.'

This question was put with an air of

interest which the matter hardly seemed to justify.

‘He is not very old—not old enough to be Urfa’s contemporary,’ said Lizzie, still smiling, but feeling just a little aggrieved upon Mr. Leyden’s account.

‘Well, it is a most marvellous paper,’ said Miss Argand, ‘and does you great credit. Every one is talking about it.’

‘I was very glad to find it pleased Mr. Argand,’ said Lizzie, modestly.

‘No doubt. It must be always a satisfaction to a contributor to find that the editor appreciates him—that is, of course, his work. Do you propose remaining long in town?’

‘Why, yes. If all goes well, I hope to remain here permanently.’

‘Indeed? It seems almost a pity, with your evident love of the country, and your talent—I may say, genius—for describing it, that you should bury yourself in London.’

‘But there is something to describe even in London.’

‘Yes, yes; but all that has been done

I'm afraid you'll miss the fresh air and the scenery.'

The speaker bit her lips, and shook her head, and glanced through the window upon the Marylebone Road so disparagingly that Mrs. Richter felt herself called upon to say something in its defence.

'We have not a very cheerful look-out here, it is true; but the air is wholesome enough.'

'As wholesome, you would say, as in Harewood Square, at all events,' remarked Miss Argand, frankly. 'That's quite true; but then, you and I, Mrs. Richter, are not so young as your niece. Now, don't you agree with me that young people are always best away from the smoke and roar and whirl of London?'

'We are not much in its whirl,' observed the widow, gently. 'We live, of necessity, a very quiet life. Moreover, we are not in a position to choose for ourselves.'

'What we should like,' said Lizzie, with some piquancy of tone, for the visitor's re-

mark had displeased her, 'would be a house in the country, a house in town, and a house at the seaside.'

'Oh ! I don't mean that,' exclaimed Miss Argand, flushing to her forehead. 'I am sure I should like all sorts of things which are altogether out of my reach. Only it is as easy to live, in a quiet way, of course, in any place as in London. I am sure, if it were not for Felix and the "Millennium," nothing would induce me to live in town.' Then she went on in a half-frightened tone, like one who has exceeded, or perhaps disobeyed, her instructions from a higher power, 'I do hope, Miss Dart, that you and your aunt will let us see something of you. It is my brother's particular wish to make your acquaintance. People get on so much better in business matters—if, indeed, one may call literature business—when they know one another personally. My at-home day is Wednesday, but any day on which you will be good enough to call, I shall be charmed to see you.'

Then, with a shake of Mrs. Richter's

hand, so cordial that it seemed to have something of compensation in it, and a somewhat less demonstrative squeeze of that of her niece, Miss Argand took her departure.

There was silence between the two ladies for some moments after she left the room ; they stood looking at one another as if each waited for the other to express her opinion on the visitor before hazarding her own.

‘She is certainly very strange,’ observed Mrs. Richter, presently, ‘but I think she means to be kind.’

‘I am not quite sure of that,’ said Lizzie, gravely.

‘Her manner was much more genial when she first arrived,’ remarked the widow, ‘but somehow it seemed to grow colder. I am afraid I did not make a favourable impression upon her.’

‘Nay ; that fault must lie at my door, Aunt Jane,’ returned her niece, with a forced smile. ‘It was plain that my appearance fell very far short of her expectations.’

‘That is impossible,’ observed the widow,

naïvely ; ‘but I do think she resented your being so young. Having made a picture in her mind of some learned lady of middle age, she must have been annoyed at having to root it all out to make room for *you*.’

‘In that case I have the same cause for chagrin,’ sighed Miss Dart. ‘It was very foolish, no doubt, but, having formed so high an idea of Mr. Argand, I somehow imagined that everybody who belonged to him must be on the same plane. I confess I am disappointed.’

‘I thought Mr. Argand was a married man,’ observed Aunt Jane.

‘So did I,’ said Lizzie, smiling. ‘Though I don’t see how his being a bachelor should have made his sister so peculiar.’

‘No ; of course not,’ returned the widow, hastily ; ‘only, being accustomed to keep house for him, and so on, puts her in a certain position.’

‘Yet it did not strike me that she made any attempt to patronise us.’

‘Certainly not, my dear : I thought she

seemed to behave with delicacy in that way. To some women's minds the difference between Harewood Square and a second floor in the Marylebone Road would have been present throughout the interview.'

'She is not a vulgar woman,' remarked Lizzie, confidently, 'but that only makes her behaviour the more unintelligible.'

'I am not prepared to say that I dislike her,' said Aunt Jane, with an air of concession.

'No ; nor I, exactly. I am quite prepared to say, however, that I don't like her manner. Upon the whole, I am sorry she came. It would have been better if I had followed my instincts and called upon Mr. Argand at his office.'

'Oh, Lizzie, that would never have done, since it turns out that he is not married.'

'My dear Aunt Jane, what does it signify to his contributors whether the editor of the "Millennium" is married or not ? I could never get you to understand that literature—that is, the business part of it—is just as much a business as dealing in corn.'

‘Very good, my dear ; I only hope that it is in a less depressed condition than the newspapers describe corn to be.’

Her words, as Lizzie quite understood, were not meant to be discouraging, except so far as the present topic was concerned, but what particular ‘fad’ dear Aunt Jane had got in her mind she could not guess.

‘Well, I suppose we must return Miss Argand’s call, at all events,’ observed Lizzie ; ‘and since the invitation was given in so formal and almost reluctant a way, it had better be on her at-home day.’

‘I am ashamed to confess, my dear,’ said Mrs. Richter, with a little flush, ‘that I don’t quite know what an at-home day is.’

‘It is a day set apart for the reception of those outside acquaintances whom we must receive,’ explained Lizzie, laughing, ‘so that for the remainder of the week, at least, we may feel ourselves free of them.’

CHAPTER XX XII.

IN HAREWOOD SQUARE.

ON the ensuing Wednesday Mrs. Richter and Miss Dart presented themselves in Harewood Square. Mr. Argand's house was one of the smallest it contained, and they found the little drawing-room crowded with callers. Lizzie had rather feared, from what Miss Argand had said to her, that she would find herself the object of some attention; but the buzz of conversation was only just as much interrupted by their entrance as happens when strangers make their appearance in a circle the members of which are tolerably well known to one another. It was resumed again, as water meets behind the hand that parts it, as soon as they sat down. The company was composed almost entirely of

ladies ; the few males who were scattered among them had rather the air of chaperons—elderly persons who, having nothing particular to do, had accompanied their belongings to a scene in which they took little personal interest. There were, however, one or two young men, of more or less intellectual physiognomy, whom Lizzie shrewdly concluded to be paying their respects to the lady of the house with a view to indirectly commending themselves to her brother's notice. It was the ladies who almost exclusively kept up the ball of conversation, and, as a rule, with much more than the average success. Their talk was by no means confined to the 'movements' of the aristocracy, balls, or bonnets, but dealt with art and literature, as well as the more engrossing topics of the day. Their attire was, in many cases, æsthetic ; it was a marvel to Mrs. Richter how some of their gowns held together, for they appeared to be draped in them rather than dressed. The conversation was not only lively but continuous ; it required no lifting from the hostess, who,

indeed, seldom joined in it unless she was appealed to. She had motioned the two late comers to the sofa where she sat, as though she desired to have them near her, but she only addressed to them a few commonplaces. It seemed to Lizzie that, though perfectly at ease with her numerous guests, she seemed preoccupied and a little nervous. Presently, a little knot in her immediate neighbourhood started a topic which appeared to have a keener interest for them than those they had hitherto discussed.

‘It is no use our appealing to Miss Argand,’ said one of them, looking at the hostess with significance, ‘or I am sure she would corroborate my view.’

‘At all events, she would not corroborate Mr. Herbert’s view,’ observed another.

‘I think not, indeed,’ said a third, contemptuously, and then they all laughed.

‘I don’t know what the knotty point is,’ observed Miss Argand, ‘which you pay me the compliment of supposing I can unravel.’

‘Oh, we know you can unravel it,’ rejoined

the first speaker, 'only you are so obstinate and unkind. We are talking about the famous article : concerning its merits we are all agreed, but about its authorship we are as much at sea as ever.'

Miss Argand turned very red, and shook her head.

'Now, you mustn't be angry with us,' said the second speaker, 'and we don't want you to betray your brother's confidence ; but do tell us whether it is quite a new hand that wrote it, or an old one that pretends to be new ? If the latter, we shall be much relieved, for, though success in any form is to be deprecated, we shall not mind it so much where we are used to it : what we all abominate is rising talent.'

'Pray speak for yourself, Mrs. Broom,' cried the other ladies, in chorus.

'Not at all,' rejoined that lady, who was a novelist of some reputation ; 'let us be quite honest, and set the example of frankness. Now, don't tell us that it is a new hand.'

'I shall certainly not tell you that, nor

anything else about it,' said the hostess ; ' it is a subject my brother does not wish discussed.'

' Wish discussed ! ' echoed speaker number three. ' Well, upon my word, that is going a little too far. The idea of an editor getting a new genius, or an old one pretending to be a new one, to write him a first-rate contribution, and then not wishing it discussed ! Why, of course, that is the very thing he does wish. If it was only moderately good, I can imagine that mystery might be some advantage, but when nothing is to be gained by it, why not satisfy our curiosity ? Just consider what an advertisement we should make for your brother ; all our tongues going nineteen to the dozen, in the best literary circles, in praise of Mr. Argand's novice, as they say in the sporting journals ; or (if it must be so) in praise of some famous author who, we had fondly hoped, had written himself out.'

' I must positively decline to reveal the writer's name,' said Miss Argand, snatching up a newspaper and using it both as a fan and a screen.

‘We are getting warm, as the children say,’ murmured the lady novelist. ‘I don’t think she will be able to hold out much longer.’

‘We don’t want his name,’ persisted number three, ‘or, rather, we are hopeless of getting that out of you. We want to know whether he is a new man.’

‘And whether he is a young man,’ observed number one ; ‘*that* particularly, for it will make him all the more interesting to us.’

‘Or whether he is a man at all,’ put in number two. ‘Mr. Herbert pretends to have discovered, from internal evidence, that this paragon is a woman.’

‘Mr. Herbert is a great critic,’ observed Miss Argand, with well-affected gravity.

‘Oh, come, we are not going to stand that !’ put in Mrs. Broom, indignantly ; ‘a more pretentious and untrustworthy guide has never essayed to lead astray the public taste.’

There was an uncomfortable silence for a moment, for every one knew that Mr. Herbert

had fallen foul of Mrs. Broom's last novel in the 'Literary Review.'

'Still, he has some discernment,' remarked number one; 'though not, indeed, as a reviewer'—a murmur of adhesion seemed to pervade the entire room; 'and I should like to know what has caused him to adopt such an extraordinary opinion.'

'Well, I have heard,' said number three, 'that he finds certain tender touches in it.'

'In the description of the jockey's spurs?' put in Mrs. Broom, with acidity.

'No, no; in the account of the Danish wives who are waiting in vain at home for the return of their husbands—all slain on Battle Hill; and these, he says, could only have been written by a woman.'

'On the contrary, they could only have been written by a man,' contended Mrs. Broom. 'Of course, a man would make out that the widows were in a dreadful state.'

Mrs. Richter gave a little groan: the lady novelist was too much for her; yet, strange to say, such little attention does the ordinary

reader pay to what he reads—she had not the least idea that it was her niece's contribution that was under discussion.

‘Moreover,’ continued number three, ‘Mr. Herbert says, in his article in the “Looker On” this week, that, though the coursing on the downs is so admirably described, it is a feminine view of sport ; there is more pity for the hare expressed than “brutal man” would exhibit.’

‘In sentiment, at all events,’ observed one of the young men, whose attention, like that of the rest of the company, had been gradually absorbed by the subject under discussion, ‘it strikes me that the new writer, whoever he is, is an imitator of Dickens.’

‘No, sir,’ observed Mrs. Broom, authoritatively, ‘the man who wrote “A Bit of Old England” has a style of his own, and is an imitator of nobody.’

‘Good heavens ! they are talking about *you*, Lizzie,’ murmured Mrs. Richter, in a terrified whisper.

Miss Dart, who had, of course, been aware

of the fact from the first, nodded her head as though in reply to some indifferent remark ; the conversation immensely amused her.

‘ I suppose,’ observed a lady, ‘ there is no chance of our seeing Mr. Argand here to-day ? ’

‘ I am afraid not,’ replied the hostess.

‘ Well, you tell him,’ said Mrs. Broom, rising, ‘ that I should dearly like to have the cross-examining of him for five minutes about his contributor. Heaven bless you, my dear ! ’ Here she kissed her hostess with much demonstrativeness of affection, and left the room.

‘ I suppose you will tell us one thing, Miss Argand,’ observed the young man who had already spoken, as the door closed behind the lady novelist. ‘ It was not Mrs. Broom herself who wrote the article, was it ? ’

‘ It certainly was not,’ answered the hostess. ‘ What should make you think of such a thing, Mr. Wybrow ? ’

‘ Oh, only that she praised it so,’ was the naïve rejoinder. At this there was a general laugh, a clatter of empty tea-cups as the

guests placed them on the table, and the rustle which attends the breaking up of a female conclave. Mrs. Richter and her niece also rose from their seats, but, at a whispered word from their hostess, 'Be so good as to stay a moment,' they resumed them.

Then Lizzie understood at once that the master of the house, though by no means 'at home' in the conventional sense, was in fact within doors, and would presently see her. Hardly had the front-door closed, indeed, on the last of the visitors when Mr. Argand entered the drawing-room. He was a tall, spare man of thirty-five, but looking considerably older ; his brown hair, mixed with grey, was already beginning to be scant ; his shoulders had that stoop in them, produced as much from a habit of keeping their eyes on the ground as from the sedentary nature of their pursuits, which almost always belongs to men of thought. His eyes were large, though somewhat sunk, and full of expression. He came in very quickly, holding out his hand with an eager smile. 'How good it is of you

to have come to us, Mrs. Richter,' he said ; then, as Lizzie's hand met his, he retained it, patting it as if she were a child, and regarding her with the utmost interest and approval. 'So this is really you, is it, Miss Dart ? It seems incredible, doesn't it, Joanna ?'

'Miss Dart looks very young, as I told you,' said Miss Argand, drily, her indifferent manner contrasting very strongly with the excitement and surprise exhibited by her brother.

'Well, and what did you think of our dilettanti ; I beg their pardon, I mean our literati ? You have nothing to compare with them at Casterton, we flatter ourselves ;' here he smiled, and so significantly that it was plain his words of boastfulness had the sense of deprecation.

'I thought some of them very interesting,' said Lizzie, 'especially Mrs. Broom.'

Miss Argand glanced at her brother, as much as to say, 'You hear that ? Where is the discernment of character of which you talk so much ?'

‘In what way interesting?’ inquired Mr. Argand. ‘I am curious to learn how she struck you.’

‘I thought her very clever and also honest, but with a better opinion of her talents than that entertained by others. Is she “anybody very particular,” as Mr. Hook used to say?’

‘She is anything but particular,’ observed Miss Argand. ‘I never knew a woman say such things.’

‘She is certainly remarkable. Yes, a woman of character. An authoress, too, of considerable note,’ said Mr. Argand, in the tone of a man who weighs his words, but with a certain distrait air, as though they were the words of somebody else.

‘You know you will never take one of her novels for the “Millennium,” Felix, though she has importuned you enough to have persuaded the unjust judge.’

‘Quite true, my dear ; she has only failed because I am too good a judge. Everybody says that sooner or later, Miss Dart, I must

call in the aid of fiction, but then it need not be Mrs. Broom's fiction. On the other hand, she is undoubtedly a clever woman, and, as you say, "honest," after a fashion. She speaks her mind.'

'What I meant by honest was that she did not seem to be afraid to acknowledge her own weaknesses, or even the merits of others. Perhaps, however, I ought to confess that she was so good as to take up the cudgels for my poor little contribution.'

Mr. Argand shot a glance at once astonished and displeased at his sister.

'Oh! you needn't be alarmed,' she replied, complainingly. 'I have disclosed no secrets; but, unfortunately, Miss Dart's paper became the subject of discussion in her presence. Even a vivisectionist would have felt for her. However, they never found out that they were cutting her up.'

'Isaac Walton could not have treated his worm more tenderly, I do assure you,' said Miss Dart, laughing; 'they really were most appreciatory.'

‘Literary folk mostly are ; it is only the fools and the failures who are grudging,’ observed Mr. Argand. ‘Who were there here to-day, Joanna?’

‘Miss Rian.’

‘Poetess,’ explained Mr. Argand, like a quick chorus ; ‘has written some charming lyrics, and at least one tedious epic ; bears the reputation of being a great classical scholar with everybody—that is, with everybody who doesn’t know the classics.’

‘For shame, Felix!’ remonstrated his sister.

‘Never mind me, my dear ; I am only saving Miss Dart’s time. She would find all these people out for herself, and paint them to the life for us in half a dozen sittings. Well?’

‘Then there was Miss Dixie.’

‘Female representative of the higher culture. She’ll talk to you by the yard about the mission of art. She has the courage of her opinions, and dresses in the Grecian style.’

‘I noticed her,’ murmured Mrs. Richter.

‘Well, then, perhaps you can tell us how she does it,’ observed Miss Argand, with an interest that seemed to be aroused in spite of herself. ‘She assures us that she never uses hooks or eyes, or laces, or pins, or buttons for her garments. Do you think they are held together by the edges of postage stamps?’

‘That is much too prosaic,’ said Mr. Argand; ‘let us suggest, with diffidence, “everlasting bands.”’

‘They are sold at fourpence a box at Whiteley’s,’ observed Mrs. Richter, confidently—a piece of information which was received with suppressed rapture.

The widow’s natural and pleasant ways recommended themselves to her host and hostess. Her prejudice, if it could be called by so harsh a name, had already given way to liking for the latter; while the former, to meeting with whom she had looked forward with terror, she pronounced, to herself, quite delightful. With Mr. Argand, Lizzie was, as she had expected to be, at her ease, except, indeed, that she felt she owed him certain ac-

knowledgments she could not speak of at present ; and which, while they remained unexpressed, left her, as it were, an ungracious debtor ; but between Miss Argand and herself she felt there was an invisible barrier, composed of she knew not what. It was certainly not anything of her own creation. She was naturally desirous of being good friends with one so nearly connected with the kindly editor, nor did she herself dislike her hostess, but she was conscious of that instinct of repulsion, wanting only to the most egotistic, and which never errs, which warned her that the impression she had made upon Miss Argand was unfavourable. It was curious ; for not only had she from the first, of course, endeavoured to make herself agreeable to her, but it was plain that Miss Argand had called upon her aunt with the best intentions, and presumably with the desire to be pleased. It could not be ascribed to jealousy ; for, even if Lizzie had been inclined to plume herself upon her brief and solitary literary performance, which she was far from doing—indeed, the high terms in

which she had heard it spoken of astonished and amazed her—Miss Argand was not herself a woman of letters. Her manner again, though distinctly unconciliatory, was as difficult to define as her reasons for dislike were to discern. It had nothing of the offence of patronage about it ; nor of that insolent neglect which women of fashion do not scruple to use in their own houses to guests of their own sex whom it is not worth their while to cultivate ; it was not even exactly cold. But what graciousness there was in it seemed to be admitted against the grain. Her face, however, had never expressed such decided displeasure as it did when Mr. Argand presently said :—

‘ Now, Joanna, you must do your very best to make yourself agreeable to Mrs. Richter, for I am going to talk to this young lady about business matters.’

‘ Then you had better go into the back drawing-room,’ was the grave rejoinder—a reply evidently rehearsed beforehand, and which seemed to be dragged out of the speaker by the roots.

To this proposition there was, of course, no alternative but to consent ; and Miss Dart rose at once and passed with her host into the next room, which, though undivided from the larger apartment by either door or curtain, admitted of private converse.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

EDITOR AND CONTRIBUTOR.

MR. FELIX ARGAND was one of those men who, with all the will in the world to be precise and neat, are inherently the reverse in practice. He boasted that he knew where to lay his hand on every manuscript in his office, and not without reason, but, to the looker-on, it seemed incredible that to such a labyrinth of confusion there could be a key of any kind; he was accurate and punctual in all things, but he arrived at these virtues by a way of his own which would have driven any one else who pursued it distracted; the simplest operations of arithmetic he performed in a manner that Colenso never dreamt of, but nevertheless successfully. With the work of his hands he was equally peculiar, but the

result was not so felicitous ; he was, in fact, dreadfully clumsy. To wheel an easy-chair into a quiet corner for his companion's accommodation, and to place a footstool beneath it, was by no means with him what 'to snatch a battle-axe from the nearest foe on the one hand, and to strike man and horse to the earth on the other,' is to the hero of romance —*i.e.* the work of an instant. It took a considerable time ; but he went about it with the enthusiasm of a 'navvy at a barrow.' Miss Dart could not help smiling at his laborious arrangements for her comfort, but she nevertheless appreciated them ; they were evidently exceptional marks of favour with him. When they were completed to his mind, he sat down close beside her, and, in a tone in which sincere respect was strangely blended with curiosity, he said, 'Now do, pray, tell me all about yourself, Miss Dart.'

'But I have told you, or at least written to you, Mr. Argand, all that could possibly interest you about so small a subject.'

'Pardon me, but you did not tell me.;

you rather misled me—though, I do not doubt, without meaning it. I had pictured to myself somebody wholly different.’

‘In what way?’

‘It is hardly fair to put that question,’ he answered, smiling; ‘perhaps I expected too much—in the way of age. You’re absurdly young, you see, to be a contributor to the “Millennium.”’

‘I am very sorry; perhaps in ten years’ time or so, I may be competent for it. Is there no method of accelerating ripeness? Would you recommend me to go round the Cape?’

He laughed long and softly, eking out his mirth like one who enjoys something rich and rare, rocking himself to and fro, and nursing his knee, but at the same time looking at her steadfastly.

‘I recommend you to do nothing,’ he said, earnestly, ‘but to follow in all things your own suggestions. There are minds which, in literary matters, require a hint or two to start them, as some pumps require a few drops of

water to set them a-going ; and there are others to whom every recommendation from without is an obstruction and an embarrassment : you belong, I fear, to the latter class.'

' Why did you say, " I fear " ? ' inquired Lizzie. ' If it is as you say, I shall give you less trouble.'

' I did not know that I had said " I fear," ' he answered, simply ; ' it was an unconscious outburst of selfishness ; I had flattered myself, before I had the pleasure of seeing you, that I might have been of some assistance to you in the path you have chosen.'

' You have been of more assistance to me already than gratitude can express,' she answered, eagerly ; ' that is what I have wanted to say to you ever so long ; for though it is only a few days since I received your kind letter, it seems a lifetime : your words of encouragement have indeed given me new life.'

He listened to her like one who partakes of some pleasure of which his judgment, if

not his conscience, disapproves, but who cannot resist prolonging it. 'It is only fair and right,' he said, 'to tell you that you are mistaken. You are like a passenger at some great railway junction who has happened, through information supplied by a passer-by, to have just hit his train ; if he had not done so he would have caught the next, and if not that the next. I have been so fortunate as to offer the first opportunity of making you known to the world—that is all : genius, like murder, will always out.'

Miss Dart shook her head and smiled. 'I am going to put a very impertinent question, Mr. Argand. Are you quite sure if this insignificant contribution of mine, of which I must say it seems far too much has been made, had not appeared in the "Millennium"—if, in short, you had had nothing to do with me—do you honestly believe you would have thought so highly of it ?'

'As regards the "Millennium," I boldly say "yes." I should have been transported with envy had I seen it anywhere else ; but

as to your second question—well, if I had not seen you, of course I should have thought less of your talents. What is merely excellent in the writing of a man of fifty is a miracle in one of fifteen.’

‘And would you have thought I was fifty?’ inquired Miss Dart, smiling.

‘No ; because your pen has too light a touch ; but I should certainly have thought you nearer fifty than fifteen. In that very misleading account of yourself, you say that you have been engaged in tuition for the last eight years. How could that possibly have been ?’

‘I might have been a nursery governess, and taught spelling, surely, while I washed the baby and dressed the children, and wheeled the double perambulator.’

‘Stuff and nonsense ! You ?’

‘It is true, however, that at sixteen I was pupil teacher in a ladies’ college.’

‘Dear, dear ! And was that necessary ?’ inquired Mr. Argand, with compassionate earnestness.

‘It was right and fitting, at all events; as to necessity, my dear Aunt Jane, yonder, would no doubt have kept me in idleness out of her scanty income to this day, had I allowed her.’

Mr. Argand’s eyes flashed towards Mrs. Richter a look that seemed to say, ‘Excellent woman!’ and then flashed back again to his companion. It seemed as though he could read her genius in her features, so great was their attraction for him.

‘Well, and then?’

‘I stayed at the college nearly eight years, and then went out as a governess to—well—near Casterton, as you know: that was my first situation.’

‘And you have had no experience of life?’

‘Nothing to speak of.’

‘It is wonderful; it is incredible,’ he murmured. ‘But where did you get all your knowledge of social matters? It is only hinted at, of course, in what you have written, but it has not escaped me.’

‘ I have read whenever I had leisure for reading.’

‘ What have you read ? ’

‘ Everything that came in my way.’

‘ Not excluding the newspapers, it seems ? ’

‘ Certainly not ; that was the only means I had of knowing what was going on in the world. I have always thought for myself ; now I want to see for myself.’

‘ What is it you want to see ? ’

‘ Everything. Not the Tower and the Thames Tunnel, but the world ; not society only—which is a very small portion of it—but human life. That is the sole thing that now interests me.’

‘ Why do you say *now* ? ’

The colour flew to Miss Dart’s cheek. ‘ Because I have given up teaching, and wish to be a student myself.’ Up to this point Mr. Argand had been well convinced that his companion had been telling him the whole truth ; it was now equally plain to him that she had something to conceal. He would have given much to hear what it was ; but

he would not for worlds have called up that blush again, for there had been distress and pain in it.

‘I wish the “Millennium” was a newspaper,’ he said, smiling; ‘you would make an admirable special correspondent.’

‘Would not a home correspondent be of some use to you? A writer who would treat of social matters—not, indeed, from a new point of view, but from an old one which has been forgotten?’

‘I don’t quite understand you.’

‘It is difficult to explain myself, yet I know what I mean. Every social question seems now covered by layers of dust—the result of party feeling and conventionality; there are new ways of looking at them—mostly utopian or immoral—but they cannot even be *seen*. Would it not be possible to let the light of Nature in upon them? You will say this requires originality of mind. Not at all. It only requires simplicity—nay, even a sort of ignorance. There have been humorous attempts at looking at civilisation from with-

out, through the eyes of barbarians, but I am a serious barbarian.'

'Very true,' said Mr. Argand; he was not thinking of her definition of herself, but of her proposition. 'If any one else had made such a suggestion to me, I should have laughed at it, but you have exceptional advantages for such a task.'

'You mean disadvantages?'

'To a certain extent, yes,' he answered, thoughtfully. 'Has your mind dwelt long upon this scheme of setting the world to rights?'

'Yes; but very vaguely. It is only of late that it has obtruded itself.'

'Some shock, no doubt, has brought it to the surface. Just as the fall of a large stone into a lake will bring up objects at the very bottom to the face of the water.'

'Perhaps.' Her eyes were riveted on the carpet, her lips were drawn together, her cheeks were once more crimson.

'Well, you can try your hand.'

'Thank you.' Her tone had gratitude in

it, but also a sober satisfaction and relief. It was not so much that of a person who has made an appeal which has been granted, as of one who has made a suggestion likely to be of common advantage which has been acceded to.

‘There is only one thing more,’ said Mr. Argand; ‘you must understand that this is to be a business affair; that you and I are talking as editor and contributor, and in no other relation with one another.’

‘Of course,’ she answered, simply. ‘How else could I have ventured to ask what would have seemed a mere favour?’

Mr. Argand bit his lip. ‘I hope, Miss Dart, even if it had been so, you would not have hesitated to ask me a favour?’

‘Certainly not. I am under much too great an obligation to you already to feel the weight of a little more kindness or indulgence, but this is a professional matter, wherein to ask a favour would not have been fair.’

‘That is not, by any means, the view of

the ordinary contributor, I do assure you,' said Mr. Argand, with a sigh—the echo of many a reminiscence. 'However, what I was about to say is that, since we have come to an understanding about this affair, the usual arrangements must be entered into. The proposition you have made me may, and indeed must, entail certain expenses. You will, therefore, not be offended when I say that you must allow me to advance you what is requisite——'

'Offended!' she put in quickly. 'Why should I be offended? I have been accustomed to take five pounds five shillings—the last not always in silver—every quarter for my professional services. That is one of the things that strike me as so strange in the world: why people who have, perhaps, very little delicacy about anything else, should be so sensitive about money matters. The workman is worthy of his hire, only, I object to his being paid before his work is done.'

‘But in this case, as I say, there may be initial expenses : money out of pocket.’

‘Then I will come to you with my account. I am afraid, Mr. Argand, you must think me dreadfully practical,’ she added, softly.

‘I think you—quite right,’ said Mr. Argand. The sentence, which had begun enthusiastically, seemed to end coldly, discreetly, and in a manner that he had not intended. ‘It is a great mistake to mingle sentiment with business.’

‘Yet, to judge by your letters,’ she answered, gently, ‘you allow sentiment—if, at least, kindness and pity come under that head—to influence your conduct even as regards practical matters.’

‘You are thinking of your young friend at Casterton. Well, of course, I was touched by his peculiar circumstances ; but not to the extent’—here he smiled, as he flattered himself, like a rogue, but, to Lizzie’s eyes, it was a very pleasant smile—‘of engaging his

services for the "Millennium." I only recommended him to somebody else.'

'But even that was kind.'

'I don't know. It is as troublesome to refuse to grant a favour as to ask one of another.'

'Not to a selfish nature.'

'We men are all selfish. It is true, however, that we are not all brutal. Though sentiment does not affect our dealings, social matters have, no doubt, a great influence on them. It is said that more bargains are struck in the city at luncheon time than during any other hour. Personal acquaintanceship, no doubt, oils the wheel of business-life better than the best professional introduction.'

'And is it not the same in literature?'

'That is a very delicate question. Indeed, with an editor, it is a sore subject. Personal acquaintanceship is his bane. If a man knows me enough to nod to, that is urged as a reason for my accepting a contribution—

if not from himself, from some protégé. If I take a lady down to dinner, she writes to me next morning offering a MS. upon that ground. With those he knows more intimately it is even worse ; for to refuse a friend's admission into "our columns" is to lose him. An editor should have no friends to start with. I sometimes wish that all my communications with my fellow-creatures could be carried on through the post, so that I need never be brought face to face with them.'

'But this is very discouraging,' observed Miss Dart, with gravity.

'Do, pray, believe me,' he added, quickly, 'that I am not universally morose. There are contributors whom I have desired to know, and, having known, appreciate all the more. Indeed, it is one of the chief recommendations of a literary calling that it introduces one to the people who are best worth knowing.'

'I can well imagine that,' said Miss Dart, enthusiastically. 'How charming it must be

to have one's ambition in that way gratified!'

'But it is not *my* ambition,' returned Mr. Argand, drily. 'I appreciate its advantages, of course, but the profession of letters is not my ideal of life. Perhaps I have no ideal; but what I take most interest in is politics. That seems to astonish you.'

'It amazes me! Do you wish, then, to be in Parliament?'

'Most certainly I do.'

'And on which side?—for from the "Millennium" I am not even able to gather that.'

'I hope not. I shall be on neither side. If ever I take my seat in the House—which is very improbable—it will be as a very independent member. However, that is a subject which can hardly interest you. We were talking of Mr. Matthew Meyrick. His poems are really very creditable to him—and to you for having discovered them. I hope the young gentleman is better.'

'I am afraid he will never get better. He

has, I fear, an incurable disease—some ailment of the spine.'

'Still, that is not always incurable. He should come to town, and see Dredge about it.'

'Dr. Dredge? That is the gentleman Dr. Dalling spoke to me about, to the same effect, at Burrow Hall. How I wish I could persuade Matthew to see him!'

'I should have thought you could persuade him to do anything,' said Mr. Argand, simply. 'What is it, Joanna?'

His sister was standing behind his chair.

'I have already addressed you twice, Felix,' said that lady, with a complaining air, 'but you paid no attention to me. Mrs. Richter has matters to attend to at home, and wishes to know when your conference with Miss Dart is likely to be over.'

'It is not late,' said Mr. Argand, with a little irritation, produced by his sister's manner, rather than her words.

'It is indeed,' cried Miss Dart, consulting the watch her aunt had given her on the day

she had come of age. It was only a silver one, but it had cost that lady a month's income.

Lizzie rose in haste, and, as she did so, the circling notes of a gong below stairs made themselves heard.

'Dear me!' exclaimed Mrs. Richter, from the next room, 'we are actually keeping Mr. and Miss Argand from their dinner, Lizzie.'

'It is only the dressing gong,' explained the hostess, graciously. Her brother hastily whispered something to her; to which she replied, 'Impossible; not to-day—there is not enough.'

The words were inaudible to her visitors, yet one of them, at least, guessed what had been said.

Lizzie held out her hand to Mr. Argand. 'I thank you once more for your great kindness.'

'Don't talk of that,' he said, but he took her hand, and returned its pressure warmly. Doubtless, he forgot the circumstance—as his

sister often said, 'Dear Felix was so absent'—since, after escorting his visitors to the front door, he again took her hand; which, Mrs. Richter afterward observed, though not absolutely improper, was unusual: like being helped twice to soup.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

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